

Master's Thesis Philosophy
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The Human Mind in Spinoza's Ethics

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Introduction

In light of the philosophical climate of the seventeenth century, an intellectual environment still profoundly dominated by a Christian conception of man and man's position in the world, Spinoza's conception of the human mind, as the idea of the human body, is as bold as it is unique. Spinoza explicitly breaks with the Christian tradition by firmly denying any transcendent source of man's rational capability and at the same time diverts with his understanding of mental life from a Cartesian metaphysics of the mind. According to Spinoza's metaphysics, man's capacity to have thought should no longer be explained through some privileged status or rational soul that a benevolent God has bestowed upon him. Thought is a defining feature of nature and of everything in nature. Man's capacity to think should be explained by the same means by which any product of nature is explained: through the eternal and necessary laws of nature.

When we conceive of the human being as an individual that thinks, we can call this mode of thought the human mind. But as a consequence of the thought-like nature of God, there are countless other individuals that think. Spinoza's naturalism seems to dictate that there cannot be any radical difference between the human mind and other thinking individuals. But when we read the *Ethics* we do encounter evidence for the assumption that Spinoza did acknowledge fundamental differences between the human mind and other ideas. Furthermore, there is a clearly discernable tendency in Spinoza's writings in the *Ethics* to reserve the term 'mind' for human modifications only. Thus, in spite of Spinoza's naturalism we find evidence for a willingness on Spinoza's part to credit the human mind with a privileged status among other modes of thought. How should we appraise this apparent status of the human mind in light of Spinoza's belief that we should explain the nature of human individuals by the same laws that operate throughout the whole of nature?

In this thesis it will be one of my main goals to try and give a clear account of the human mind as an individual under the attribute of thought. Spinoza treats rather extensively of the human mind in the *Ethics*, but he is nevertheless rather silent about other thinking individuals. This thesis is also, in part, an effort to begin to fill in this lack of information concerning other individuals of thought through reflection on the nature, the formation and preservation of individuals in Spinoza's metaphysics. The relation of the human mind with other modifications of the attribute of thought, especially with those modifications that Spinoza would have regarded as of a lower degree of excellence than the human mind, such as complex animals, will be a central focus of this thesis. Ultimately, I wish to show that there are reasons why Spinoza could have, and in fact did, consider the human mind to be a modification that is, in some respects, significantly unlike these other modifications.

In the first chapter of this thesis I will lay out the general metaphysics as a necessary background, in order to fully explain Spinoza's conception of the human mind. This will in particular involve clarifying Spinoza's understanding of the nature of ideas and his conception of the mechanics of individualization. In the second chapter we will consider Spinoza's use and understanding of the term 'mind'. In the third and fourth chapter we will evaluate features of the human mind that might explain its differing nature in comparison with other modes of thought.

Finally, we will be able to conclude that Spinoza regarded reason as a privileged feature of the human mind in contrast with modes that can be regarded as of a lower structural complexity than the mature, sane human mind. This ability of the human individual should be connected with Spinoza's restriction of the designator 'mind' to the human individual. However, we will also be able to see that reason is nevertheless not a feature peculiar to the human mind, but that, when considered in the proper order of philosophizing, reason is a feature of nature, expressed in the human mind.

1. The Mind as the Idea of the Body

Dealing with Spinoza's metaphysics comes down to juggling these three concepts: substance, attribute and mode. Everything about reality, every aspect of it, even reality itself, is ultimately explicable in terms of all or one of these concepts. In the following section (and in this chapter on the whole) I will attempt to give a concise interpretation of these important concepts, mainly for the purpose of specifying how the human mind fits into the overall metaphysical scheme. The now following section (and the entire first chapter) could be considered to be quite lengthy, but I think it is important to disclose how I understand the most basic concepts of Spinoza's thinking before tackling the more specific interpretational difficulties of Spinoza's theory of mind.

1.1 The metaphysics

Spinoza defines substance as follows: "By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed."¹ This definition expresses two characteristics of substance, which, according to the explanatory clause stated in the definition, express one and the same feature of substance, namely its radical independence. The first characteristic of substance according to 1Def3 is that substance is 'in itself'. To express that something is in itself, rather than in something else, is to express that for its existence substance is not parasitic on anything (1p15d). Substance does not inhere in something else. In its existence it relies on nothing else. Secondly, substance is conceived through itself. To be conceived through itself involves the notion of conceptual independence, as we can read in 1Def3. From 1ax5 we can infer what it means for the concept of one thing not to involve the concept of another thing. This axiom reveals that for something to be conceptually independent means for that thing to be understandable solely in terms of itself. It relies on no other concept from which it is to be understood. Consequently, the reverse comes down to the following: what it means for something to be conceived through something else, is that the former is understood, or explained, in terms of the latter. Because substance, by 1Def3, is conceived through itself it is fully explainable in terms of itself. Some commentators on Spinoza have acutely observed that apart from an equivalence of conceiving and explaining, there is also an affinity between the relation of 'being

¹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 1Def3.

All references to Spinoza's *Ethica* in this thesis will be in the form of parts (1,2,3,4,5), definitions (Def) axioms (ax), propositions (p), scholia (s), corollaries (c), and successive numbers (e.g. 2p7s will be the scholium to proposition 7 of the Second Part). All English references are quoted from the translation by E. Curley (1996). The Latin references are taken from H. Krop's edition of Spinoza's *Ethica* (2008).

conceived through' and the relation of 'being caused by' in Spinoza's metaphysics.² I believe that Michael Della Rocca, in *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, is on the mark when he observes that the way in which Spinoza uses 1ax4 in 1p3d and in 1p6c reveals this affinity between 'being conceived through' and 'being caused by'. The alternative demonstration in 1p6c states that if a substance had been caused by another substance, knowledge of the former substance would depend on knowledge of the latter, which is absurd according to 1Def3. This definition, as we have seen, is not about causation directly, but about the conceptual independence of substance. We see then that the use of the fourth axiom bridges the relations of 'being conceived through' and 'being caused by'. The use of this axiom in 1p6c result in the claim that because substance is conceived through itself, substance is self-caused. If the fourth axiom would not be understood as revealing a deep-rooted affinity between causal and explanatory relations in Spinoza's metaphysics, the demonstration in 1p6 would not result in the claim that substance is self-caused. We will come to see in this thesis that the affinity between 'being caused by' and 'being explained through' is of major importance to Spinoza. Also observe Spinoza's rationalism in the alternative demonstration of 1p11: for each thing that is the case, there is a "reason" or possible explanation why it is the case. Which is the same as saying that there is a cause that explains its existence.³

The doctrine that Spinoza tries to establish in the first fourteen propositions of the first part of the *Ethics*, is that substance is unique. According to Spinoza, a substance has attributes (what these are will be elucidated below). Substances also have modes, but these should not concern us yet since according to Spinoza substance is logically and ontologically prior to its modifications, thus any real difference between substances cannot involve them.⁴ But if we were to distinguish between substances, how should we proceed? This should be done according to the attributes of substance. 1p5 tells us that substances that share an attribute would in that respect be indistinguishable and hence would be one and the same. Consequently, according to Spinoza, substances cannot share any attributes between them. God, a being that according to 1Def6 consists of infinitely many attributes, necessarily exists.⁵ The indiscernibility of substances that share one (or more) attributes yields as a result that besides God there cannot be any other substance, for God necessarily has all the attributes. Ergo, there is only one substance: God.

² Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body problem in Spinoza* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 10-12.

³ Spinoza, *Ethics* 1p11: "For each thing there must be assigned a cause, or reason, both for its existence and for its nonexistence."

⁴ Compare *Ethics* 1p1 and the use of this proposition in 1p5.

⁵ That God necessarily exist is supported by the following reasoning that Spinoza offers (stated briefly): substance cannot be caused by another substance because substance is conceived through itself, so being conceived through itself comes down to being self-caused. A being that is the cause of itself, according to *Ethics* 1Def1, necessarily exists.

After this digression, which was meant to illustrate the view that according to Spinoza there is only one substance and which was not in any way meant as a statement about the legitimacy of the inference, we should examine what Spinoza meant by the term 'attribute'. Spinoza does define 'attribute', but the definition considered on its own is somewhat puzzling: "By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence".⁶

Of all the attributes of God, the human mind is only capable of knowing two: extension and thought.⁷ Extension and thought are two of the infinitely many attributes that constitute the essence of God, which makes it tempting to say that thought and extension are somehow in God, or are properties of God. But the wordings in 1Def4 of the 'intellect' that 'perceives' an attribute 'as constituting' the essence of substance, complicate things. Spinoza appears to incorporate an element of appearance or subjectivity into the definition of attribute. Spinoza thought that because attributes are conceived as constituting the essence of something that is conceived through itself, an attribute, too, is conceived through itself. As we have seen, this would be the same as saying that each attribute of substance is conceptually independent. The concept of one attribute is completely explanatorily independent of the concept of another attribute. Translated into terms of the attributes of thought and extension this means that every fact about extension is explainable in physical terms only, and could not rely on an aspect peculiar to thought (and vice versa). If we recall the notion of 'intellect' that appears in 1Def4, the definition could be interpreted as follows: the intellect conceives an attribute, say extension, as constituting the essence of substance, i.e. conceives substance as extended, and the intellect conceives another attribute, namely thought, as an essence of substance. But, although the intellect conceives them as distinct, it might well be that in reality this conception of two distinct attributes of substance is an illusion due to the intellect's perceiving. According to this interpretation substance would not really be extended and thinking and all of the other attributes, but would only appear to be so according to the intellect. However, this interpretation is not a correct representation of Spinoza's views of the nature of substance and its attributes. I shall explain why. The intellect that features in 1Def3, is God's infinite intellect. It would not make sense if the intellect in 1Def3 would be the human intellect, for the human intellect

⁶ Spinoza, *Ethica* 1Def4 "Per attributum intelligo id, quod intellectus de substantia percipit, tanquam ejusdem essentiam constituens."

⁷ The arguments Spinoza offers for this assertion are not very extended. It is even questionable whether Spinoza argues for this position at all. We get a hint of how Spinoza might have argued for the issue from the use of 1ax5 in 2p13d. There Spinoza claims that if the object of the mind were anything besides the body, an idea of it would necessarily be in the mind. This demonstration is presumably meant to prove that no other mode of extension besides my body is included in the object of my mind; for there is no awareness of any other mode in the mind. But arguably it could also be said to prove that apart from the mode of extension that is the object of my mind, no other mode from any other attribute is the object of my mind. Thus the human mind is only conscious of thought and extension. Which is roughly the same assertion as 2ax2 and 2ax4. Spinoza deals more explicitly with this difficult matter in Letter 64. However the argumentation there appears to be little more than a variant of the above argument.

perceives only two attributes of substance, whilst the definition should be about all the attributes of substance. Furthermore, in 2p7s Spinoza implicitly refers to 1Def4 and here explicitly uses “infinite intellect” instead of merely “intellect”, which suggests that we should also read “infinite intellect” for “intellect” in 1Def4.⁸ In short the argument against a ‘subjective reading’ of Spinoza’s 1Def4 would go something like this: God has an idea of his essence (2p3) and all ideas that God has are necessarily true (2p32). When God’s intellect perceives the attributes as really distinct (1p10s), his idea is necessarily true. Thus substance really is extended and is thinking and all other attributes.⁹ What the infinite intellect perceives as real is real.

Now that we have dealt with the concepts of substance and attribute, we should focus our attention on the third concept that is of major importance to Spinoza, namely mode.

Modes are defined as “the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived”.¹⁰ This definition reveals a dual relation (also observable in the definition of substance) of inherence and conceptual dependence. Modes are conceived through substance, of which they are affections. Given the identification of substance and attribute that is revealed in Spinoza’s writing (1Def4 and 1p10), what it means for modes to be conceived through substance is for them to be conceived in terms of an attribute of substance. Or, what is the same, to be explained through an attribute of substance. In case of the human mind, this means that everything conceivable for the mind will be either thought of as being extended or thought of as being a thought. What it means for modes to be in, or to inhere in, substance might, on the other hand, be somewhat more difficult to interpret. Modes cannot be conceived as parts of substance, for substance is indivisible (1p13). The relation of inherence might more plausibly be understood in terms of the relation of subject and property.¹¹ But it remains questionable whether modes are properties of substance according to Spinoza.

The concrete examples that Spinoza gives of modes in the Ethics are necessarily confined to the two knowable attributes of thought and extension. Under both of these attributes there are roughly two categories of modes: infinite modes and finite modes. I will not be concerned with the infinite modes here, so I will refrain from saying anything about them for the time being. All finite modes under the attribute of thought are ideas.¹² The notion of ‘idea’ in this context is one peculiar

⁸ The demonstration to Ethics 2p4 also mentions the “infinite intellect” in connection with the adequate perception of God’s attributes.

⁹ Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem*, 163.

¹⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics* 1Def5.

¹¹ For a more extensive treatment of this topic, see John Carreiro, “On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza’s Metaphysics,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33 (1995), 245-73.

¹² That all modes of thought are ideas is made explicit in the use of 2ax3 in 2p11. For an excellent treatment of this issue, see Michael Della Rocca’s article “The Power of an Idea”. In this article Della Rocca forcefully argues that an ontological difference between modes of thought, following from the supposition that there are modes of thought that are not ideas, would for Spinoza be an intolerable and unintelligible brute fact.

to Spinoza. I shall try to elucidate it in section 1.3 of this chapter. The prime example of a finite mode under the attribute of extension is the human body (1p13). In this context Spinoza also mentions the parts that compose the body as modes of extension. We could call both of these examples extended things, but I think that Spinoza ultimately regarded bodies as the most basic extended modes. So we can safely say that the finite modes of extension are bodies.¹³

Some commentators on Spinoza consider the interpretation of things (like particular bodies) as properties of Spinoza's substance, to be unintelligible. Most notably E. Curley has argued against the view that modes, as particular things, can be predicated of Spinoza's one substance. According to Curley things such as tables and elephants are the wrong kind of entities to count as properties of anything.¹⁴ This has led him first of all to the view that modes considered as things cannot inhere in God as properties. Rather, they are only causally dependent on God. And secondly he believes modes of extension to be facts, rather than things. Against this second claim I will only object that I cannot see this as a convincing reading of the *Ethics*. As for the first view, I think John Carreiro in his article "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance" is right to observe that it is motivated by a reluctance on Curley's part to consider the possibility of particular properties. Carreiro thinks that, because Curley sees properties as bound up with qualities that are predicable of substance, he disregards the possibility of individualized properties that are not universally predicable of substance, but nonetheless do inhere in a substance.¹⁵ But this is not the place to go into this technical matter too deeply. Yet a last remark on the matter seems in order. If we deny the modifications of substance the relation of inhering in substance and only accept, as Curley in fact does, a merely causal relation between modes and the substance that has caused them, an ontological space looms between substance and its modes which makes hard work of interpreting passages like 1p15: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God." Followed by its demonstration: "Except for God, there neither is, nor can be conceived, any substance [...]. But modes [...] can neither be nor be conceived without substance. So they can be in the divine nature alone, and can be conceived through it alone. But except for substances and modes there is nothing [...]. Therefore, [...] nothing can be or be conceived without God, q.e.d."

As we have argued above, Spinoza thought causal and explanatory relations to be equivalent. The interplay of the two relations of 'being conceived through' and 'being caused by' is observable in 2p5 and 2p6. Because the mode of an attribute is conceived through that attribute, and only through

¹³ Spinoza also appears at times to take certain physical events as modifications of substance. For instance in *Ethics* 2p12 and 2p22 ("the affections of the body"). But I think that for Spinoza these too would be ultimately reducible to particular bodies. Thus maintaining the ontology that properly speaking modes of extension are bodies, i.e. extended things.

¹⁴ Edwin Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: an essay in interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 18.

¹⁵ Carreiro, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics," 257-259.

that attribute, it is also caused solely by that attribute. Modes of one attribute are causally and conceptually separated from other attributes and from the modes of those attributes. Modes of thought can only be causally connected with (other modes of) thought; ideas cause only ideas, whilst extended things cause only extended things. Although the modes of thought are explanatorily and causally independent of the modes of extension, Spinoza asserts in 2p7s that the series of modes under the attribute of extension expresses the very same order and connections of causes as the series of modes of the attribute of thought. In other words, God considered as extended substance displays an architectural layout or structure that is isomorphic to God considered as thinking substance; although the first structure is to be understood as physical and the second as mental. This needs to be explained.

Because God's power of thinking is infinite, God forms an idea of everything that follows from his essence. That is, God has an idea in thought of everything that follows from all of the attributes (2p3). Necessarily in God there will be an idea of every mode of extension. We read in the scholium to 2p7 that, according to Spinoza, there is a relation between a mode of extension and the idea that God has of that mode of extension, namely identity: "a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways". This follows from Spinoza's use of 1ax4, which reads: "the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause".¹⁶ Presumably, in the demonstration of 2p7, Spinoza understands the Latin "cognitio" in 1ax4 to denote not merely the more technical or logical understanding of it as 'cognition'. Rather, "cognitio" should be equated with the finite mode under the attribute of thought: an idea. The demonstration of 2p7 should then be understood to amount to the following: given a mode of extension, this mode is caused by another physical modification, which is also caused by another mode of extension, etc. In God there is an idea of the first mode, but this idea depends on and involves another idea, which is matched by the physical mode which causes the physical mode matched by the first idea, etc. The causal order of the physical universe is matched by a causal order of ideas.

[W]e must recall here what we showed, namely, that whatever can be perceived by an infinite intellect as constituting an essence of substance pertains to one substance only, and consequently that the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that. So also a mode

¹⁶ Spinoza, *Ethica* 1ax4: "Effectûs cognitio à cognitione causæ dependet, et eandem involvit."

of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways.¹⁷

It should not concern us here whether Spinoza legitimately argues from the one substance doctrine to the theory that every mode is matched by an idea. Rather, we should concentrate on the radical view that emerges from Spinoza's 'attribute-parallelism' (the doctrine that emerges from the whole of 2p7 and the quote above), namely that for every single mode considered under the attribute of extension there is a numerically identical mode under the attribute of thought. The causal order that is displayed by the universe considered as extended is exactly mapped by a one-on-one parallel series of ideas that displays the same order and connection of causes as the physical universe, in thought.

Now that the general metaphysics of the *Ethics* is laid out, we should focus in on the particular mode of the thinking substance that will be the main subject of the remainder of this chapter: the human mind. Inadvertently this amounts to making a move similar to the one Spinoza himself makes when he moves from *Part One* to *Part Two* of the *Ethics*.¹⁸

1.2 The mind as an individual

For Spinoza the human mind is a finite mode of the attribute of thought and because all finite modes of thought are ideas, the human mind is an idea; the human mind is a mode of substance, when substance is conceived as something characteristically mental. Although the human mind is a single mode of God, i.e. one idea, it can also be considered a complex idea made up of numerous ideas that together constitute this single idea.¹⁹ That the mind is a mode and not a substance, is one of Spinoza's most radical and innovative advancements on Cartesian metaphysics. According to Descartes, besides God, the mind, too, is a substance and ideas are modes that inhere in it. Spinoza retains the metaphysical scheme of ideas as modes that are in a substance, but he no longer assigns to the mind the status of substance. There is little mistaking the 'I' who thinks, in Descartes' famous "cogito ergo sum": the mind is a separate thing of which ideas are properties, the I is a substance, a subject that has thoughts which are his or hers. But, it will be interesting to see how Spinoza ventures to establish a proper subject of thought, without being able to rely on a metaphysical

¹⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p7s.

¹⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics* 2 Preface: "I pass now to explaining those things which must necessarily follow from the essence of God, or the infinite and eternal Being—not, indeed, all of them, for we have demonstrated (IP16) that infinitely many things must follow from it in infinitely many modes, but only those that can lead us, by the hand, as it were, to the knowledge of the human Mind and its highest blessedness".

¹⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p15.

distinction between substance and mode. But before we examine Spinoza's theory of individuals, we should examine closely the relation between the modes of thought and extension.

Because the mind is an idea, the parallelism of God's attributes asserts that there will be a mode under the attribute of extension parallel and identical to the mind. "The first thing which constitutes the actual being of a human Mind is nothing but the idea of a singular thing which actually exists" (2p11). The phrase "Idea of", in this proposition and in many more, if not all, of Spinoza's propositions, entails more than the mere symmetry exemplified by the series of modes of thought and extension. 'Idea of' also designates a representational relation that holds between an idea and the physical mode to which it is parallel. That Spinoza thought ideas to represent their physical correlates, becomes clear when we consider the following: in 2p7c, Spinoza says, "whatever follows formally from God's infinite nature follows objectively in God from his idea in the same order and with the same connection". With his use of the terminological pair 'objective' and 'formal', Spinoza places himself in the same tradition as Descartes. By objective reality Descartes meant "the being of the thing which is represented by an idea, in so far as this exists in the idea". And "[w]hatever exists in the objects of our ideas in a way which exactly corresponds to our perception of it is said to exist *formally* in those objects".²⁰ Although these definitions are not very transparent and are open to several interpretations, we can safely deduce from them that 'objective' is more or less synonymous to 'representational'. That Spinoza was aware of this use of the term 'objective' is obvious from the third definition of *Part One* of Spinoza's outline of Descartes' *Principia Philosophiae*, which reads: "By the *objective reality of an idea* I understand the being of the thing represented by the idea, insofar as it is in the idea."²¹ Although it is not uncommon for Spinoza to retain traditional terminology and replace its conventional meaning with something wholly different (e.g. Spinoza's notions of 'God' or 'attribute'), it is not likely that this is the case with 'objective'. Rather, I think 2p7c should be understood as saying that for every mode of extension there is a mode under the attribute of thought that represents this mode.

Ideas bear a representational relation to modes of extension. But to which modes of extension exactly? Well, according to Spinoza, in the case of my mind, the ideas that are contained in it are ideas of my body. This does not mean that all of my thoughts are minute representations of physical processes going on in my body, this would be a misconception of Spinozistic ideas and of the nature of thought in general. My ideas represent my body, but their content is not restricted to the body, they are also about other bodies besides my own body. Nevertheless, the ideas in my mind always correspond and somehow represent the physical composition of the parts of my body. In the

²⁰ Descartes, "Author's replies to the Second Set of Objections," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes (Vol. II)*, trans. John Cottingham et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), CSM 113-114.

²¹ Spinoza, "Parts I and II of Descartes' "Principles of Philosophy"." In *The Collected Works of Spinoza. Volume 1*, trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 239.

case of the perception of external objects, for instance, my 'sense-ideas' are paralleled by the physical sensation of seeing. The modifications that constitute the physiological process of seeing are caused by external objects, but they are modifications of my own body. Both physical entities, the external object and my own body, are needed for the actual sensation of experiencing an external object. Thus, although my idea of an external object is a representation of the physical state of my body, it is not a representation of it in the sense of being an exact copy or image of the physical processes going on my body. The idea that represents my bodily state of seeing some object is a mental expression rather than a picture of a physical process.²² I conceive my idea to be of the physical object, i.e., my idea is about the external object, although ontologically it is of my body. My sense-idea is a confused representation of the object, due to the fact that it is caused by the external object, but not parallel to the object.²³ I will return to this aspect of Spinoza's theory in a later section of this chapter.

Although Spinoza is forced by his attributeparallelism to acknowledge that the mind contains an idea for every individual part of the body, he did not see himself equally forced to acknowledge that this means that the mind is conscious of every part of its body. Against Descartes, Spinoza maintains that not every item in the mind is a conscious item. When he says in 2p12 that "[w]hatever happens in the object of the idea constituting the human mind must be perceived by the human mind" he cannot have meant that the mind is conscious of everything that happens in the body. We clearly are not. We shall look at some of these matters more fully in the third chapter of this thesis. It is a necessary consequence of God's infinite power of thinking (2p3) that there is a corresponding idea for every mode of extension. Whether there would similarly be a corresponding mode of extension for every mode of thought (because of a presumed infinite power to act in God), remains, I guess, a matter of speculation.²⁴

²² It should be noted that the example of seeing an external object might be somewhat misleading. For a sense-idea would, according to Spinoza, be a typical example of an inadequate idea. i.e. an idea that expresses confusedly the nature of both the external object and the nature of the affection of my body. An adequate idea of the physical mode that constitutes the sensation of the external object might well involve expressing adequately in a mental expression this physical process.

²³ The idea is of course not caused by the object considered as a physical entity, but by the idea parallel and identical to the extended object. We need to posit this idea if we do not want to violate the explanatory barrier between the attributes.

²⁴ The corollary to Ethics 2p7 does seem to suggest this. But elsewhere we can read Spinoza as affirming that thought extends more widely than extension. On this, see the *Short Treatise* Appendix II 9 in Curley's translation: "Therefore, the essence of the soul consists only in the being of an Idea, or objective essence, in the thinking attribute, arising from the essence of an object which in fact exists in Nature. I say *of an object that really exists*, etc., without further particulars, in order to include here not only the modes of extension, but also the modes of all the infinite attributes, which have a soul just as much as those of extension do." And Curley's note to this passage (page 154) where he connects the text with Spinoza's admission to Tschirnhaus in *Letter 66*.

A profound belief that it is of the nature of thought to be about something, i.e., a profound belief that ideas have a representational nature, probably motivated Spinoza's theory that every idea is of a mode of extension. But what guaranteed Spinoza's further belief that a particular idea is of a particular body? Why is my mind solely an idea of my body? Why can't my mind be of other extended modes as well? In a way, the mode conceived under the attribute of extension with which the human mind is identical is by definition the human body; but in the trivial sense of just being the mode with which the human mind is identical. The questions above aim at understanding the richer account of the identity of the mind and the body, wherein the body is the (mature) human body consisting of feet, arms, hair, eyes, a brain, etc.

A preliminary answer that Spinoza might have given to the questions above could have been some kind of experiential approach to the problem. We might have been asked (by Spinoza): Are you aware, in a first-person manner, of any body except your own? No? But, wouldn't it be plausible that, if your mind contained ideas that are related to other bodies besides your own, you would somehow be conscious of those bodies? Feel them, as it were? Now, you have acknowledged that you weren't. Obviously, then, your mind is the idea of nothing other than your own body. That such a route might have been taken by Spinoza has some textual ground when we read the second and fourth axioms of *Part Two* for what they are, namely inferences from experience, and not a priori inferences.

But we could enhance the original question and ask, why is my mind the idea of my entire body and not just of some part of it? For instance of the brain? To this question Spinoza's answer would have been more technical and would resonate some of the core concepts of his philosophy. The human being conceived as a particular mind is an individual under the attribute of thought. The human mind, being an idea, is a part of the infinite intellect of God (1p11c). And just as every idea in God, it is identical to a mode under the attribute of extension. Given Spinoza's representative account of the parallelism of the attribute of thought, the mode identical to the human mind will reasonably be the human being conceived as a physical individual. It will be that mode of extension which we conceive as a human individual under the attribute of extension. That is, it will be the human body and not just some part of it. I believe this to be a core insight on Spinoza's part. It is the realization that without the rest of the body the brain would be of little use. The brain needs the entire body for nourishment, for informational input, etc. Spinoza's understanding of the human individual amounts to saying that we are our minds just as we are our bodies. It depends on the particular consideration, i.e., a context dependent inquiry that involves either the concept of extension or thought, whether we conceive of a human being (or the whole of nature for that matter) as mental or physical.

The argument above does answer the question why the mind is not the idea solely of some part of the body, but of the whole body. However, the delineation of the human body might not be

as clear as the argument requires. During our lifetime we lose and gain an enormous number of cells, our bodies mature, we grow, lose hair, lose weight, gain weight, etc. Does my mind cease to contain representations of modifications or states of my body that are lost? What does properly belong to the human body of which the mind is the idea? Does this include the hairs on my head, and those that I have lost over the years? It seems a little strange to think that my mind contains ideas of configurations of my body that I have lost. But Spinozistic doctrine does seem to require us to say that there once was an idea in my mind of every state of my body, even if that idea corresponded to modes of extension that are now no longer part of my body. However, this does not have to be a major difficulty for Spinoza's account of the mind and actually it is not a difficulty at all when we consider the mind as a dynamic whole, instead of a static entity remaining always the same; the mind is constantly affected and changed to some degree by numerous influences. Furthermore, I believe that we will be able to formulate answers to the questions above with the help of Spinoza's conception of the human body as an individual, to which we shall turn briefly. Then, we will see that it is primarily the relation that holds between the parts constituting the body, and not the particular parts themselves, that is important in the preservation and constitution of an individual.

So far we have refrained from trying to define, in great detail, what a mind is. Unfortunately, at first glance, it appears as if Spinoza has done the same. There is no real definition of 'mind' anywhere in the *Ethics*. And it appears as though 'mind' just enters the scene in 2Def3 and reappears in 2p11 to claim a prominent role throughout the remainder of the book. But this would not be giving Spinoza the credits he deserves. *Ethics* 2Def3 reads: "By idea I understand a concept of the mind which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing". The definition, as it stands, would, in comparison with other early modern understandings of 'idea', not be a very uncommon way of thinking about ideas in the seventeenth century. But it is misleading. Remember that the mind is an idea. Thus, according to 2Def3, the mind is itself an idea that forms ideas. Spinoza denounces the doctrine of the mind as substance, but 2Def3 does reveal that Spinoza maintained a terminology of inherence; of ideas that are in and formed by a mind. This, I think, gives us a clue as to how we should clarify Spinoza's conception of mind. The ideas that form the human mind are, taken together, more than a mere collection of ideas. Jointly they constitute a unity, an individual. At this point we should say something more about Spinoza's thoughts concerning individuals.

Immediately we are faced with a problem. The Lemma's, Axioms and Postulates in between p13 and p14 that form some of the most important yet scarce evidence on Spinoza's thoughts concerning (complex) individuals are concerned with physical modifications only. But, as we have already repeatedly observed concerning the distinct attributes of God, no feature of the one can be explained by or be dependent on a feature of the other. We cannot render individualization under the attribute of thought intelligible by appealing to physical mechanisms of individualization. It

seems though, that if there is a way in which a complex of bodies manifests itself as an individual under the attribute of extension, regardless of how we should construe this particular physical instantiation, Spinoza's mind-body identity thesis permits us to assume that there will be a way in which ideas manifest themselves to form a complex mental individual. In other words, 'being a complex individual' appears to be a fairly attribute-neutral property belonging both to physical and mental modes. However, we should be thoroughly aware that within Spinoza's system we are not allowed to argue that the human mind is an individual because the human body is an individual.

Another example of an attribute-neutral property, i.e. a property exhibited by both the mode of extension and the corresponding mode of thought, is the number of causes or effects a particular modification has.²⁵ If body 1 causes bodies 2 and 3 and is itself the effect of body 0, then Spinoza's "same connection of causes"-principle (2p7s) assert that, idea x (the mode identical to body 1) will cause ideas y and z (the modes identical to bodies 2 and 3) and will itself be caused by idea w (identical to body 0). We will have to investigate whether we can say anything about mental individuation with the help of such attribute-neutral properties.

The physical excursion in between p13 and p14 reveals two important criteria for what constitutes an individual under the attribute of extension.

When a number of bodies, whether of the same or of different size, are so constrained by other bodies that they lie upon one another, or if they so move, whether with the same degree or different degrees of speed, that they communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner, we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body or Individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.²⁶

First of all, the parts composing an individual must communicate their motion to each other, and secondly, they must do so in a "fixed manner". This amounts to the body's maintaining the "same ratio of motion and rest" (2L5) between its parts. The preservation of this ratio in local motion and throughout the continuous regeneration of certain parts of the body, is what ensures an individual's continued existence over time (2L6). It is important to note that Spinoza saw 'individual' as a relative concept. The human body is an individual with a fixed ratio between its parts. But in like manner the liver, or any other (complex) part of the body, can be considered an individual in its own right; with its own ratio between its inner parts (cells, etc.). Moreover, the human body itself can be considered

²⁵ Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem*, 35-38.

²⁶ Ethica, Definition following 2p13: "Cùm corpora aliquot ejusdem, aut diversæ magnitudinis à reliquis ità coërcentur, ut invicem incumbant, vel si eodem, aut diversis celeritatis gradibus moventur, ut motûs suos invicem certâ quâdam ratione communicent, illa corpora invicem unita dicemus, et omnia simul unum corpus, sive Individuum componere, quod à reliquis per hanc corporum unionem disitingitur."

as a part of an even larger individual, say a household, or city. And again these individuals can be considered as parts of even larger individuals, a province or country. This relative hierarchy of individuals eventually culminates in the largest individual conceivable, made up of all the bodies under the attribute of extension, which Spinoza calls the 'face of the whole universe'.²⁷

The preservation of the ratio of motion and rest of the body connects neatly with Spinoza's conatus doctrine: "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being."²⁸ Accordingly, in connection with what has been shown above, an individual body will try to preserve the same ratio of motion and rest between the parts of its body; for that is what defines it as this particular individual.²⁹ The preservation of the same ratio will be essential for every physical individual.

Now, what can we say about mental individuation? The concept of a ratio will not help us, for this is tied in with a physical context. However, the connection between individualization and the successful preservation of a certain characteristic of an aggregate of modes, together with the conatus-doctrine, will be helpful.

Spinoza viewed neither bodies nor ideas as passive.³⁰ The fixed proportion of motion and rest of an individual body represents an equilibrium of certain causal forces cooperating, as it were, to constitute a single individual; a single mode of God. This individual will be constantly subjected to outside forces. Some of which will contribute to the individual's survival, but others will be detrimental to the individual's existence. That is, some things will aid an individual in preserving its particular ratio, whilst others will disturb the ratio (and others will be neutral to the individual's ratio). Within this environment of interacting causal forces we can regard the human body as one single cause, as one single mode. A physical thing concerned solely with its own survival: striving to preserve its own ratio. I think we can rephrase this in terms of the interacting causal forces and say that an individual will strive for its continuation as a modification of God that can be considered as a locus of action: a physical aggregate, in constant interaction with its direct environment, striving to ensure its own survival.

I believe that we can implement this notion of an individual's striving to preserve itself as a locus of action at the mental level. To repeat the by now familiar dictum: for every mode of extension there is a mode of thought identical to it. The connection and order of causes in the universe considered as something physical are exactly mapped by a causal order and connection of

²⁷ *facies totius universi*

²⁸ Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p6.

²⁹ When a body preserves the same ratio of motion and rest, then, Spinoza says, the body "retain its nature" (2L5). In the *Ethics*, the nature of an individual is often equated with the essence of an individual.

³⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics* 1p36. For a consideration of the active nature of bodies see also *Letter 81*, in which Spinoza criticizes Descartes passive notion of matter.

ideas. The fixed ratio that constitutes an individual under the attribute of extension, expresses a certain connection of physical modes and thus a certain connection, or order, of causes. Consequently, there will be an order of causes identical to that order in thought. Under the attribute of thought there will be a collection of ideas causally linked, so as to constitute, as a correlate to the human body, a single idea: a locus of action under the attribute of thought. In the case of the human body this will be the human mind. Considered as an individual under the attribute of thought, the human mind, like the body, will strive to preserve its individuality. In case of the body we concluded that the individual's striving will be directed at preserving the fixed ratio of motion and rest between the parts of its body. But what does the mind's striving to preserve itself as an individual amount to?

In 3p10 Spinoza says, "the first thing that constitutes the essence of the mind is the idea of an actually existing body, the first and principal [tendency] of the striving of our mind [...] is to affirm the existence of our body". It appears that the striving of the mind to persevere in its being is focused on the continued affirmation of the body. We can conjecture that this affirmation will involve, or in effect is, the mind's continued representation of the body. And that the continued flow of ideas representing the body, is what secures the existence of the mind as an individual over time. Although I do think that this is fundamentally correct, it is still rather abstruse what exactly Spinoza might have meant by it. In order to fill in a more detailed account of the human mind as an individual, the next section will be concerned with answering the following important question more clearly than we have already done: what are ideas?

1.3 The mind as an idea

The third definition of *Part Two* of the *Ethics* reads: "By idea I understand a concept of the Mind that the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing." To which Spinoza adds: "*I say concept rather than perception, because the word perception seems to indicate that the Mind is acted on by the object. But concept seems to express an action of the Mind.*" In this definition an idea is defined in terms of a mind that forms it. But, whose mind is Spinoza referring to here? From the general focus of the second part of the *Ethics* it is most likely to assume that Spinoza is referring to the human mind. (For all we know, humans may be the only beings with minds.) But still, it remains peculiar that Spinoza phrases the definition of such an important notion in terms of the mind. After all, all ideas are in God and Spinoza never refers to God's idea as God's mind. What does the concentration on the mind in 2Def3 tell us about the range of the definition?

Two possible answers present themselves. Either we should say that the focus on ideas as concepts of the mind restricts the tenability of the definition to humans. Or, we should say that it only emphasizes the special focus (on the human mind) peculiar to the second part of the *Ethics*; and

not so much a restriction. I prefer the latter answer for the following reason: the first answer would lead Spinoza into accepting a metaphysical distinction between ideas in the human mind and ideas that constitute other modes of God. A dissimilarity which does not accord well with Spinoza's overall explanatory naturalism. Nevertheless, we should be aware that throughout the largest portion of the *Ethics* Spinoza is mainly concerned with human beings. Many of the most important propositions that provide information as to how we should construe ideas according to Spinoza appear to be concerned with human modifications only (see for instance 2p49). This raises questions concerning the sphere of applicability of the conclusions drawn from these propositions. These questions deserve answers and it is the object of this thesis to try to provide some of them.

2Def3 reveals at least one important feature of ideas: they are actions of the mind. The only reference Spinoza makes to 2Def3 in the *Ethics* is in the scholium to 2p48. There again to remind us of the active nature of ideas. And in 2p43s we read that an idea is not "something mute, like a picture on a tablet," but rather "a mode of thinking, namely, the vary [act of] understanding". With his understanding of ideas as action of the mind, Spinoza directly opposes Descartes. According to Descartes' theory of ideas, as Spinoza probably understood him to have maintained, ideas are like passive data presented to the mind. A separate faculty of the mind, the will, is needed to assent to the presented content of an idea. This results in a judgment the mind makes in which it affirms or does not affirm that something is the case according to the presented content of the idea. Spinoza rejects the possibility of a feature of the mind, such as a separate faculty of the will, that would not be fully understandable in terms of, and completely reducible to, ideas. All modes of thought are ideas. Will, intellect, desire, love, doubt (etc.): they are all a matter of ideas, i.e., they are all ideas (in some way or another).

When we affirm that something is the case, this is not due to a separate faculty of the will. The affirmation or volition is already inherent in the very idea. This is what Spinoza tries to establish in 2p49. Although the demonstration might not be a very successful one, the proposition and adjoined scholium do tell us a great deal about the nature of ideas.³¹ What it means for ideas to be active, it appears, among other consequences, is for them to already incorporate an affirmation. As such, ideas are acts of thought that reveal a propositional structure. That ideas in the mind are structured like assertions is entailed by Spinoza's rhetorical question concerning the idea one might have of a winged horse. Spinoza asks us: "what is perceiving a winged horse other than affirming wings of the horse?"³² We should cautiously refrain from construing this to mean that ideas are mental sentences, i.e. that my idea of a winged horse is like the mental correlate to the spoken

³¹ For a treatment on the inadequacy of Spinoza's proof for 2p49, see Edwin Curley, "Descartes, Spinoza and the Ethics of Belief," in *Spinoza: Essays In Interpretation*, edited by Eugene Freeman and Maurice Mandelbaum (LaSalle: Open Court Publishing, 1975), 168-9.

³² Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p49s.

words: 'that horse with wings over there'. For, as Spinoza says, "it is necessary to distinguish between ideas and the words by which we signify things".³³ To claim that ideas in Spinoza are propositionally structured, mainly serves to emphasize the difference between Spinoza's account of ideas and a theory of ideas in which ideas are (mute) mental pictures. Ideas are not mental data distinguished from the mind's apprehending its content; they are the very acts of apprehension.

It is important to view Spinoza's account of falsity in light of this discussion. According to Spinoza I will regard an idea that posits the existence of a certain something as actually being the case, unless I have another idea that prevents me from doing so. We will have something more to say on Spinoza's account of error below.

Judging from the treatment of ideas in 2p49 and from Spinoza's account of error, we can conclude that my idea of a winged horse will be equivalent to what we might best call the belief, or the act of believing, 'that that horse has wings'.³⁴ Understanding ideas as beliefs also proves helpful in understanding another aspect of ideas that follows from Spinoza's definition of them as actions of the mind, namely, their causal force. All ideas are the effect of some idea and will themselves cause further ideas. This doctrine becomes intelligible when we consider our ideas to be like beliefs.

Let us take the following as an example: I have the (complex) idea that the city I live in will fall victim to a terrible flood in the next couple of hours; let's call this the flood-idea. As effect, this idea is caused by other ideas. For instance through the presence of an ominous sky or through hearing a news forecast. Furthermore, the flood-idea will itself prompt other ideas. When considered as belief-like, it is understandable how the flood-idea will trigger other ideas: the belief that a vast quantity of water is heading towards my hometown will quite plausibly induce other beliefs, like the belief that I will have to leave my house or that I will have to secure my most valuable possessions, etc.

It is conceivable that, next to the flood-idea, my mind forms other ideas that happen to contradict the flood-belief. The interesting question here would be: what causes me to believe, and thus act on, the one rather than the other? For it is one thing to have an outline of what mental causation could amount to when we consider ideas to be like beliefs, but it is another thing to have a detailed way of explaining why one thing is believed rather than another. In order to find out how Spinoza approaches this problem, we will first have to take a look at Spinoza's account of falsity more fully.

³³ Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p49s.

³⁴ For agreement by other commentators on Spinoza on the interpretation of ideas as beliefs, see Della Rocca, "The Power of an Idea" (2003); Matson, "Spinoza on Beliefs" (1994); Curley, "Descartes, Spinoza and the Ethics of Belief" (1975); and Bennett's *A study of Spinoza's Ethics* (1984). Jonathan Bennett also draws attention to how Spinoza gradually shifts from the mind's 'perceiving as present' in 2p12 to the mind's 'regarding as present' in 2p17; wherein the latter notion obviously involves the concept of belief. Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1984), 163.

Spinoza claims that falsity cannot be a positive characteristic of ideas (2p33). Rather, falsity consists in the lack of knowledge that inadequate ideas involve (2p35d). An idea is inadequate in the human mind when, according to 2p11c, God “has the idea of another thing together with the human mind”. It is not surprising that after this perplexing statement Spinoza asks for some lenience on the part of his reader. For, what does it mean? It seems that ideas are somehow inadequate in the human mind when they also involve other ideas outside of the mind. But what does it mean for an idea to involve another idea (outside of the mind)? In the demonstration of 2p24 it becomes clear that an idea is inadequate in the human mind, when the idea is caused by an idea outside of the human mind. This interpretation of the inadequacy of ideas concurs with the definitions of adequate cause and action in *Part Three* of the *Ethics*.³⁵ But how does the inadequacy of the idea in my mind exactly come about? When an idea in my mind is caused by an idea outside of my mind, for instance in case of the perception of external bodies, where the causing idea is an (hypothetical) idea in thought identical to the perceived external body, my mind, according to 2p16, will represent both the nature of the external body and the nature of my own body. The idea that I have of an external body x, will be identical to some state of my body y (by 2p7), but will represent both x and y. This confused representation of both x and y arises from my mind’s not having a full understanding of either the external body or the state of my own body; it is this lack of knowledge concerning the real state of affairs concerning the external body and the thereby caused state of my own body that renders my idea inadequate.

My flood-idea, to return to the example above, is not false because of any positive feature of the idea itself. But it is false because of a lack of knowledge concerning the real state of affairs of the world. Much in the same way as Spinoza’s example of the idea of the sun being 200 feet away is a lack of knowledge concerning the real distance between the earth and the sun.³⁶ All ideas that we get from sense perception are necessarily inadequate, for they all involve an outside cause. The idea of an ominous sky might be a cause of my flood-idea and therefore the idea has (at least some) footing in reality - a feature that seems necessary for all Spinozistic ideas. But the idea does not accurately represent any real external mode. It is as much a reflection of my own bodily state as of the world around me. We might think of this in the following way. It might happen that I am in an anxious state due to ongoing news reports about disastrous floods all around the world. My perceptions of the external world might be ‘colored’ by these other beliefs that I already have,

³⁵ Spinoza, *Ethics* 3Def1: “I call that cause adequate whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it. But I call it partial, or inadequate, if its effect cannot be understood through it alone.” And *Ethics* 3Def2: “I say that we act when something happens, in us or outside us, of which we are the adequate cause, i.e. (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.”

³⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p35s.

without my fully realizing this. The belief that a flood is imminent, is a belief that will be caused by something external (a dark sky, a news report, or even hearsay). But the object of the idea, in Spinoza's terms, is my own body; it is a representation of the state of my body. However, in my mind the idea is not an accurate description of the state of my body. For it will generally be the case that I conceive my idea to be a representation of the external body, and not of a modification of my own body. The anxious state of my body together with the idea of the dark sky could result in my belief that a flood is approaching.

I should note that this might be somewhat of an oversimplification of the process involved in acquiring a belief and that in actuality this would be a process involving numerous ideas. Furthermore, I am not sure whether Spinoza would actually say something along these lines, but I think that it does serve as a useful illustration.

However, the question remains how one idea in my mind may prevail over another. Recall that ideas are actions of the mind that cause further actions, i.e., that cause further ideas. As a cause, every idea will express a certain causal power. When the power of one idea is greater than that of another, opposing idea, the latter idea will 'lose'. For instance, I will not recognize my flood-idea as being false unless there will be another opposing idea in my mind that actually contradicts the possibility of a flood. When the opposing idea enforces itself on my mind as the correct or more plausible one, I will regard the flood-idea as false; in spite of the possibility that I might still have the flood-idea. I think that our understanding of Spinozistic ideas as belief-like can make further sense of this. Everything strives to persevere in its being. For Spinoza this entails that the mind strives to imagine those things that are beneficial to its perseverance.³⁷ Believing that a flood approaches will be beneficial in case that there really is a flood approaching, but it will not be if the belief is actually mistaken. It might even prove harmful to act on the belief when it is false. Whether or not I will believe it, will depend on the power with which this particular idea, in juxtaposition to other ideas, successfully enforces itself on my mind. When it is the case that the opposing idea is in fact backed up by other strong beliefs, stronger than the ones that will have caused my flood-idea, the opposing idea will be the one believed. In connection with Spinoza's theory, it seems to me to be a quite natural interpretation of the way in which I come to regard an idea as false, when we consider this process to be a process of competing ideas in which the winning idea is a conception nested in firmer, or, in pseudo-Spinozistic terms, more adequate, beliefs than the losing one.

The promise made above was that we would be more capable of understanding the mind as a mental individual after we had looked into the nature of ideas. I think we can now redeem that

³⁷ Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics* 3p12.

promise, I think that we are now able to understand what it means for a mind to be an individual, what it strives to preserve and how it can be considered as a locus of action.

We have seen that Spinoza defines ideas as actions of the mind, and that we could plausibly interpret this as meaning that they are something like beliefs. We were able to understand beliefs as being stronger or weaker than other beliefs in virtue of their propensity to tie in with other (strong or established) beliefs that are already present in the mind. I think we can plausibly enlarge this view and regard the whole mind as a more or less coherent set of beliefs. Like the body, the structure of the mind will be susceptible to change. This is a necessary consequence of the identity of the mind with the body. And just like the body, it will only allow a certain amount of change to its composition; up to that point at which the structural change would be so dramatic that we can no longer conceive of the same individual. We can imagine that we entertain some beliefs that are not vital to our existence. These beliefs we can do without, without losing our identity; or without ceasing to exist, for that matter. But other ideas will form a vital part of our mind. They will be those ideas without which we simply would not exist as human beings: the belief that I need water to survive, that I need nourishment to sustain my energy, but also those beliefs that constitute my understanding of whether this or that particular thing is either beneficial or harmful to my existence. We could conceive ideas like these as constituting something like a set, a whole which the mind will strive to preserve. And as such it strives to preserve its own existence. I think that this, to a great extent, might be what Spinoza means when he says in 3p11s that “the present existence of the mind and its power of imagining are taken away as soon as the mind ceases to affirm the present existence of the body.” And that “the first and principal [tendency] of the striving of our mind [...] is to affirm the existence of our body” (3p10).

We can also envisage a core set of beliefs that together constitute what we might call an individual human being’s personal identity. Many beliefs that I entertain about myself and my situation will be on the circumference of my personal identity. I could easily do without these, without losing my ‘identity’. Others will be vital to my being this very individual that I am. Here we should fill in those aspects about our own lives that distinguish oneself from other people. Beliefs that, ‘make you, you’: flags of your own personality. Losing these ideas will entail the loss of one’s identity altogether. In light of this interpretation we are able to make sense of Spinoza’s example of the Spanish poet (4p39s).³⁸ A man who, due to a severe illness suffers a rigorous loss of the particular set of beliefs that constituted his identity previous to his illness, could well be called a different individual, person, or mind, altogether.

³⁸ It is most likely that Spinoza hints at the Spanish poet Luis de Góngora y Argote (1561–1627).

At the beginning of this section we asked what the range of Spinoza's definition of idea was and answered that, although it featured the mind as subject of ideas, it should not be taken as a restricted definition, but as affirming a general feature of ideas, namely, that they are actions. Interpreting ideas as beliefs, as we have done, gave us an account of how we could understand one idea as prevailing over another. But, understanding Spinozistic ideas as beliefs has one even greater merit. The concept of belief appears to have a similar flexibility that would also be required by Spinoza's concept of idea. We can understand beliefs as momentary impressions or judgments, like the belief that there is a lion in my backyard. Furthermore we can understand beliefs as dispositions that incite actions, for instance, the belief that there is a lion in my backyard may incite the belief that I should do something about the lion in my backyard. But, above all, we can also understand them as durable dispositions that remain part of the mind; for instance the belief that lions are ferocious animals.³⁹ Taken together these interpretations of beliefs do not only allow us to give a satisfactory account of the human mind as a thinking subject, but also of the thinking aspect of other individuals. We have already pointed at this merit in the paragraphs above. When ideas can be understood as durable dispositions to act on, which, as we will develop more fully in the third chapter of this thesis, need not be (fully) conscious, we might be able to understand what it amounts to for there to be mental counterparts to the physical behavior of rabbits or ants. This allows us to understand how ideas both constitute the complex mental life of human individuals and, at the same time, the simpler mental being of an ant.

Spinoza calls the complex mode that constitutes the mental life of a human individual a mind. In the next chapter we will investigate whether, according to Spinoza's metaphysics, the human being is the only modification of the attribute of thought that can rightfully be called a mind.

³⁹ Bennett, *A study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 165-166.

2. 'Mind', as a Specific Designator

In the previous chapter we saw that a human individual considered as a thinking thing is a mind and we examined the particular processes involved in the constitution of the mind as an individual under the attribute of thought. In light of these findings we should ask the question what we should make of other non-human thinking individuals. Are they minds, too? Are horses, cats or dogs endowed with a mind? Can we sensibly speak of the mind of a sofa or a trashcan? Ridiculous as this last question may sound, it still is a fair question concerning Spinoza's metaphysics. After all, the human mind is just one of the modifications of the attribute of thought. However, when reading the *Ethics*, the human individual does appear to be the sole modification of God privileged with the special designator 'mind'. In this chapter I wish to survey some textual evidence from the *Ethics* that might, nonetheless, support a reading of other thinking individuals as minds. Unfortunately, the evidence will turn out inconclusive. Subsequently I will attempt to approach the problem in a more systematical way. Starting from the relevant aspects of Spinoza's metaphysics of mind, I will try to develop a reading of other complex non-human individuals as thinking things that are, at least, analogous to minds. But we should start with the textual approach, before we take the latter route in section 2.2.

2.1 Spinoza's use of 'mind' in the Ethics

One account of what we, for lack of a better word, will call Spinoza's panpsychism comes from the second part of the *Ethics* and can be found in the scholium to proposition 13. Panpsychism can be understood as the strong thesis that everything is conscious. But, for reasons that will become clearer in the next chapter, in connection with Spinoza, we should understand panpsychism as the doctrine that there is a mental counterpart for every (extended) thing; but not a conscious mental counterpart per se. The scholium to p13, which plays a pivotal role in both the textual as well as the systematical approach, reads (in part):

no one will be able to understand [the union of mind and body] adequately, *or* distinctly, unless he first knows adequately the nature of our body. For the things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other Individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate. For of each thing there is necessarily an idea in God, of which

God is the cause in the same way as he is of the idea of the human Body. And so, whatever we have said of the idea of the human body must also be said of the idea of any thing.⁴⁰

To what that already has been shown, and which should be taken generally, does Spinoza here refer? I think that the reference here is essentially to the propositions 10 to 13 of *Part Two* of the *Ethics*. In a way, we are asked by Spinoza to recall all that we have learned so far; i.e. the entire metaphysics of the first two parts of the *Ethics*. But we are especially requested to recapitulate those things that have just been said about man; i.e., the propositions 10 to 13. Now, 2p10 is essentially about how man is not a substance. It is not surprising that we should view other individuals in the same way. But the reference to propositions 11 to 13 is interesting. These comprise Spinoza's demonstrations for the thesis that the human mind is the idea of the human body. It is tempting to read the scholium of 2p13 as saying that just as it has been shown in connection with the human body, the idea of any complex extended thing is the mind of that thing. That is, the idea in thought corresponding to any complex individual is a mind. But that conclusion would probably be too hasty.

Yet, there is some support for such a reading in 2p12 and 2p13 themselves. In 2p12 Spinoza says that, "whatever happens in the object of any idea, the knowledge of that thing is necessarily in God, insofar as he is considered to be affected by the idea of the same object, i.e., insofar as he constitutes the mind of some thing".⁴¹ And in the demonstration of 2p13 he says: "For if the object of the human mind were not the body, the ideas of the affections of the body would not be in God insofar as he constituted our mind, but insofar as he constituted the mind of another thing".⁴² But in both cases, "some thing" or "another thing" might just as well denote 'some other human thing' instead of being evidence for the supposed fact that Spinoza regarded other non-human individuals as having minds. The textual support for the latter reading is just not strong enough. That is not to say, or at least not yet, that Spinoza might not have thought that these other "things" were other non-human things, but reading the text as such with the present evidence would be suggestive, if anything. In the demonstration of 2p11, for instance, the object of the idea which later turns out to be the human body is consequently referred to as a "thing" (*res*).

⁴⁰ Spinoza, *Ethica* 2p13s: "Verùm ipsam adæquatè, sive distinctè intelligere nemo poterit, nisi priùs nostri Corporis naturam adæquatè cognoscat. Nam ea, quæ hucusque ostendimus, admodùm communia sunt, nec magis ad homines, quàm ad reliqua Individua pertinent, quæ omnia, quamvis diversis gradibus, animata tamen sunt. Nam cujuscunque rei datur necessariò in Deo idea, cujus Deus est causa, eodem modo, ac humani Corporis ideæ: atque adeò, quicquid de ideâ humani Corporis diximus, id de cujuscunque rei ideâ necessariò dicendum est."

⁴¹ Omitting references. Spinoza, *Ethica* 2p12: "Quicquid enim in objecto cujuscunque ideæ contingit, ejus rei datur necessariò in Deo cognition, (*per Coroll. prop. 9. hujus*) quatenus ejusdem objecti ideâ affectus consideratur, hoc est, (*per Prop. 11. hujus*) quatenus mentem alicujus rei constituit."

⁴² Omitting reference. Spinoza, *Ethica* 2p13: "Si enim Corpus non esset humanæ Mentis objectum, ideæ affectionum Corporis non essent in Deo (*per Coroll. prop. 9. hujus*), quatenus Mentem nostram, sed quatenus alterius rei mentem constitueret".

Moreover, if we return to the scholium of 2p13, it is worth noticing that in this context Spinoza talks of every individual in nature as animated. Spinoza here uses the Latin word *animata*, related to the Latin word *anima*, which translates as soul; but which can also mean something like breath or air, thereby designating a principle that gives life. It is plausible that Spinoza deliberately employs this ambiguity in 2p13s. 'Soul' is used only occasionally in the *Ethics*.⁴³ Spinoza appears to have very deliberately chosen for the Latin term *mens* (*mind*), rather than *anima*, as a designator for the thinking human individual. I think that this makes the use of *animata* in 2p13s all the more worth noticing. The use of the term at this particular place does not strengthen a reading of other thinking individuals as minds. It might even weaken such a reading. Consider for a moment the suggestion that Spinoza very deliberately opts for the use of the term *mens* in connotation with the human thinking individual. If Spinoza had wanted to say in 2p13s that other individuals also have a mind, why wouldn't he have said so? Why use *animata*? We could, and maybe we should, read this as indicating that Spinoza would in fact be reluctant to use 'mind' in connotation with other non-human individuals.

However, we could also interpret Spinoza's use of *animata* in 2p13s as a reaction to Descartes' view of non-human individuals as automata. In 2p13s Spinoza directly opposes such a view by saying that all individuals are endowed with life, or are ensouled, by means of the same natural laws that also constitute the mental life of human individuals. But, regardless of how anti-Cartesian it might have been if Spinoza had said that we are not the only individuals who have minds, this is not what Spinoza here says. Again, the textual evidence is too thin.

On the whole, Spinoza's use of the term mind, in the *Ethics*, appears to be restricted to those contexts which directly concern human individuals. In this light it is a striking illustration that in the general metaphysics of the *First Part* of the *Ethics*, in which Spinoza's contemplations are not yet primarily limited to the human modification, 'mind' is mentioned only three times and only once in a more or less technical sense; in contrast with the numerous occurrences of the term in the *Second Part* onwards.⁴⁴ However, before we move towards a more systematical approach of the 'non-human mind problem', I would like to draw the reader's attention to two further passages which might have some weight in the issue. There are a couple of passages in the *Ethics* which, on a charitable reading, offer some evidence that there are indeed other non-human minds, but two stand out: the demonstration of 3p1 and Caput XXVI in the Appendix to *Part Four* of the *Ethics*.

⁴³ To my knowledge, the term 'soul', when it is meant to designate the thought-like human modification, is used in only four places in the *Ethics*. Twice in conjunction with theoretical implications which are not actually part of Spinoza's own theory: 2p35s and in the Preface to *Part Five* of the *Ethics*. Once in 3p55s. And one particularly interesting occurrence in 3p57s.

⁴⁴ Spinoza, *Ethica* 1p15s: "Sunt, qui Deum instar hominis corpore, et mente constantem, atque passionibus obnoxium fingunt [...]".

To start with the latter passage, it reads:

Apart from men we know no singular thing in nature whose mind we can enjoy, and which we can join to ourselves in friendship, or some kind of association. And so whatever there is in Nature apart from men, the principle of seeking our own advantage does not demand that we preserve it. Instead, it teaches us to preserve or destroy it according to its use, or to adapt it to our use in any way whatever.⁴⁵

This is a tricky little excerpt from the Appendix to the fourth part of the *Ethics*, for the interpretation of it might go either way. Either you read the passage as saying that humans cannot enjoy the minds of other non-humans for some reason. And then Spinoza is required to deliver a reason why we cannot do so (a reason he is able to give, as we shall see in Chapter Four). But, as such, you would in a sense acknowledge that there are other minds in Spinoza's worldview. Or, you read the passage as saying that there are no other minds we as humans can enjoy, simply because there are no such things as other non-human minds. Neither of the two interpretations appears to be the strong favorite solely on account of the presented text; and I believe that there is some truth in both readings. But when one is made aware of the further lack of evidence from the *Ethics* that would favor the former reading, one would be inclined to favor the latter.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, there is still the demonstration of *Ethics* 3p1 that we have not yet looked at. The first part of the demonstration reads:

In each human mind some ideas are adequate, but others are mutilated and confused (by IIP40S). But ideas that are adequate in someone's mind are adequate in God insofar as he constitutes the essence of that mind [only] (by IIP11C). And those that are inadequate in the mind are also adequate in God (by the same Cor.), not insofar as he contains only the essence of that mind, but insofar as he also contains in himself, at the same time, the minds of other things.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Spinoza, *Ethica* 4 App. Caput XXVI: "Præter homines nihil singulare in naturâ novimus, cujus Mente gaudere, et quod nobis amicitia, aut aliquo consuetudinis genere jungere possumus; adeoque quicquid in rerum naturâ extra homines datur, id nostræ utilitatis ratio conservare non postulat; sed pro ejus vario usu conservare, destruere, vel quocunque modo ad nostrum usum adaptare nos docet."

⁴⁶ I should add a reservation to this statement. For although other individuals might not be properly called minds, there are further, more profound, reasons why the human mind is incapable of enjoying these other individuals. Reasons that will become clear in Chapter Four.

⁴⁷ Spinoza, *Ethica* 3p1: "Cujuscunque humanæ Mentis ideæ aliæ adæquatæ sunt, aliæ autem mutilatæ, et confusæ (per Schol. Prop. 40. p. 2.). Ideæ autem, quæ in alicujus Mente sunt adæquatæ, sunt in Deo adæquatæ, quatenus ejusdem Mentis essentiam constituit (per Coroll. Prop. 11. p. 2.), et quæ deinde inadæquatæ sunt, in Mente, sunt etiam in Deo (per idem Coroll.) adæquatæ, non quatenus ejusdem solummodò Mentis essentiam; sed etiam quatenus aliarum rerum Mentis in se simul continet."

Here it looks as if we have a straightforward reference to other non-human minds. The reference in the demonstration to 2p11c makes clear that the “other things” here referred to do include other non-human things. For in 2p11c Spinoza explains what it means for the mind to perceive inadequately and we have seen that the mind’s inadequate perception of things involves the mind’s ideas being caused by external things; wherein external things necessarily includes numerous external bodies that are not human bodies. Furthermore, if “other things” in the demonstration to 3p1 denotes a set containing only humans, we would get a very odd and I think deficient proof of 3p1. However, it could be objected that in 2p11c Spinoza does not actually talk about the minds of other things, but about “the idea of another thing”. And so, when Spinoza talks about ‘the minds of other things’ in 3p1 we should regard this as a slip of the pen and substitute for it ‘the ideas of other things’; bringing it more in tune with 2p11c. I am not sure whether we should find such a suggestion convincing. In the second half of the demonstration Spinoza again talks about the minds of other things, there he says: “[...] if something necessarily follows from an idea that is adequate in God, not insofar as he has in himself the mind of one man only, but insofar as he has in himself the minds of other things together with the mind of that man, that man's mind (by the same IIP11C) is not its adequate cause, but its partial cause.”⁴⁸ The mention of ‘mind’ in “the minds of other things” would, according to the proposal above, have to be a second slip of Spinoza’s pen. However, I do not think that this idea of a second slip of the pen is very convincing. The demonstration to 3p1 appears to be straightforward evidence for a willingness on Spinoza’s part to consider other non-human individuals as minds. However, as it stands it is still a rather meager and speculative proof. Especially when we consider the fact that Spinoza’s concern in 3p1 is once more with our (human) minds, and not with anything else.

I would like to close this section on the textual proof for other non-human minds by reflecting on an interesting aspect of Spinoza’s thoughts concerning individuals. Namely, by considering the possibility of a particular type of individual that might properly be called a mind, according to Spinoza, but without it being a single human being. “Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than 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”.⁴⁹ Spinoza’s rather dynamic understanding of individuals, and in particular his theory that many separate individuals can come to constitute one single individual, allows us to, quite seriously, entertain thoughts concerning minds

⁴⁸ Spinoza *Ethica* 3p1: “Deinde quicquid necessariò sequitur ex ideâ, quæ in Deo est adæquata, non quatenus Mentem unius hominis tantùm, sed quatenus aliarum rerum Mentis simul cum ejusdem hominis Mente in se habet, ejus (*per idem Coroll. Prop. 11. p. 2.*) illius hominis Mens non est causa adæquata; sed partialis [...]”

⁴⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics* 4p18s. *Ethica* 4p18s: “nihil, inquam, hominess praestantius ad suum esse conservandum, optare possunt, quàm quòd omnes in omnibus ità convenient, ut omnium Mentis et Corpora unam quasi Mente, unumque Corpus componant”.

constituted of minds. We should think of this analogous to the mind's being a collection of ideas. Several human minds may, as the quote above suggests, come to form as it were a single mind. I do not think that it is hard to envision an example of what Spinoza might have meant with his statement. When a group of people work together and endeavor to do things and reach goals that are, on the whole, for the good of the group, then this group of individual minds can in a good Spinozistic way be considered one mind. This could open up the possibility for further speculations about shared consciousness or collective awareness in a Spinozistic context.

2.2 Non-human thinking individuals

Because, as it appears, clear textual evidence concerning non-human minds is lacking, we should approach the problem of non-human minds through the metaphysics that becomes clear in the text, instead of trying to find explicit statements that confirm or reject a hypothesis about 'non-human minds'. But first we should ask ourselves the question whether a mind is really something on an ontological level, or whether it is really just a designator, i.e., just a name for something; in this case for the human individual under the attribute of thought. The human mind is an idea and, if I understand Spinoza correctly, ideas are the only real finite particulars under the attribute of thought. It would be out of line with Spinoza's general way of explaining things if there were in nature things (i.e. minds) radically different from other things. Nevertheless, I do think that the term mind has its proper use and real footing in being the designator for a particular type or constitution of ideas: the human thinking individual.

Perhaps the following questions should guide us through the present paragraph (and will stay with us through the remainder of the thesis): what would have motivated a reluctance on Spinoza's part to designate other thinking individuals by the term 'mind'? And, if we cannot designate other, i.e. non-human, thinking individuals as minds, how should we regard them? The obvious, but nonetheless correct answer to the latter question would be: we should regard them as complex ideas of complex physical individuals. But notice how close this is to what Spinoza thinks the human mind essentially is: the complex idea of the human body. I think that, if we want to make a serious attempt at comprehending the nature of thinking individuals in general according to Spinoza's metaphysics, we should start from Spinoza's panpsychist claim in 2p13s and reconsider it, systematically.

Although there is no explicit reference to 2p7 in the scholium of proposition 13, it nevertheless strongly resonates Spinoza's thesis of the parallelism of the attributes of thought and extension; with the further adaptation that 2p13s explicitly mentions individuals. When Spinoza says, "the things we have shown so far are completely general and do not pertain more to man than to other individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate", the

occurrence of the word *Individua* in the sentence seems to me to be significant. Regardless of whether these individuals mentioned in 2p13s are minds or not, they are individuals. And that means that they will behave in the manner developed in the previous chapter. To briefly recapitulate our findings of paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3. We observed that being an individual was essentially linked to, one might even say identical with, the preservation of certain features of the complex aggregate 'individual'. Under the attribute of extension an individual's strivings will be directed at the preservation of the same proportion of motion and rest between its parts. We saw how we could plausibly understand this as an individual's striving to preserve itself as a locus of action. Furthermore, using this conception of an individual as a unified cause and relying on Spinoza's notion of ideas as active affirmations, we saw that we could understand the thinking individual as a consistent set of beliefs. From 2p13s we can infer that Spinoza did acknowledge that these formation processes are universal, i.e. that they pertain also to non-human individuals.

The idea, i.e. mind, of the human body, is not simple, but composed of numerous ideas. Similarly, the human body is a complex individual consisting of numerous bodies. As a complex structure one would expect the human mind to be comparable to others of a similar structure. However this still leaves open the question whether these similar structures are other humans, or whether they could be non-human modes. But that composite individuals lend themselves for comparison relative to other individuals, is exactly what we see Spinoza saying in the second half of 2p13s.

However, we also cannot deny that ideas differ among themselves, as the objects themselves do, and that one is more excellent than the other, and contains more reality, just as the object of the one is more excellent than the object of the other and contains more reality. [...] I say this in general, that in proportion as a body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly. And from these [truths] we can know the excellence of one mind over the others.

The human body and the human mind possess a degree of excellence that can be conceived of relative to other individuals. Furthermore, a higher structural complexity, such as a body's capability of doing many things and its aptitude of being acted on in many ways, designate a higher excellence, or more reality; in this case physical, but something similar holds for the mental. I think that when we survey the whole scholium it leaves little doubt that "others" in the above quote is also designative of non-human modifications; maybe even more significantly so than it designates other human

individuals. From this we can infer that, according to Spinoza, individuals of different natures - a term Spinoza often uses when he wants to express something like a difference of species - possess a degree of structural similarity with humans that enables us to sensibly compare them with humans. This enables us to conceive of a hierarchy of structural complexity and integrity among individuals of different natures and, additionally, between individuals of the same nature (5p39s).

It is not surprising that we should reach this conclusion. It is, as it turns out, a paradigmatic example of Spinoza's naturalism, i.e., his view that every thing in the world is governed by the same laws and forces, no exception. The most lucid expression of this principle comes from the Preface to *Part Three* of the *Ethics*, where Spinoza says:

nothing happens in Nature which can be attributed to any defect in it, for Nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same, i.e., the laws and rules of Nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same. So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, viz. through the universal laws and rules of Nature.

The same principles and forces that govern and preserve the constitution of the human individual, govern the formation of other individuals. Man is not an *imperium in imperio*.⁵⁰

When we compare this with our findings from the last chapter we get a picture of mental and physical individuation throughout the whole of nature that is, in the present context, quite convincing. That physical individuals of all natures will strive to preserve their constitutions, and that this means that they preserve a certain ratio between the parts of their bodies throughout their existence in the way that Spinoza describes it, is perfectly conceivable within Spinoza's framework. But also in the case of mental individuation we can envisage how the same principles that govern the formation and preservation of the human mind will be at work in the 'lower' organisms. Especially when we are aware of something that will be dealt with more fully in the next chapter, namely that not every idea need be a conscious idea; at least not in the 'mind' of some individual. It is not implausible to think of other individuals as particular configurations of ideas, or, as we have seen in the previous chapter, unified sets of beliefs.

However, these considerations do seem to emphasize the following aspect of individualization according to Spinoza: for composite things there will be a requisite degree of complexity within that aggregate of ideas or bodies before we can conceive it to be an individual. This is the evident observation that we cannot sensibly talk of an individual when we have only a single minute piece of matter, or an isolated belief. These modes need to interact with others, and

⁵⁰ Spinoza, *Ethica* 3 Praefatio.

only through their interaction do we start to make sense of them as individuals. A single idea is not worth much unless it is surrounded by ideas that together explain the particular apprehension and embed it in a system of further knowledge, so that together they constitute a thinking individual.⁵¹

After these considerations, what keeps us from referring to other complex individuals as minds? What prevents us from referring to the idea of the complex mode of extension horse (say), as the mind of a horse? Not much I daresay. Except for the important yet simple reason that Spinoza does not. A tendency on Spinoza's part to reserve *mens* for the human individual is, as we tried to show, clearly discernable throughout the Ethics. In the closing chapter we will come to consider issues that might have motivated Spinoza's preference with regard to the term 'mind'. But for now we can conjecture that it rests on a want for a way to somehow define and demarcate the human modification in the vastness of the universe of thought. For although all things are governed by the same rules and principles, it is nonetheless undeniable that there is something as a human nature.⁵²

However, this being said, the discussion above does enable us to fully appreciate how Spinoza's conception of the human thinking individual as the idea of the human body is, in a sense, completely general and applies to every other thinking individual. Individuals are composite bodies and ideas, governed by the same natural laws as man and they will strive for their own preservation no less than any human would. But, when we wish to stay true to Spinoza's intentions as they are delivered to us through his writings, even the aforementioned reflections do not permit us to talk of non-human individuals as minds. However, if we would digress a little from Spinoza's more explicit statements, none of which for that matter explicitly denounce a treatment of other individuals as minds, and regard the evidence that we have gathered in this chapter, then I think that we can say that the formation and preservation of other thinking individuals is relevantly similar to the formation and preservation of the human mind; it needs to be due to Spinoza's naturalism. This leads me to conclude that, still staying true to Spinoza's metaphysics, we can consider other thinking individuals as modifications of the attribute of thought that are, at least, analogous to minds.

If the structure of other thinking individuals is, as Spinoza thought, relevantly similar to the human mind, then we need to raise important questions concerning man's position in nature with regard to the other finite modifications of thought. These questions will be either of an ethical nature or of a metaphysical nature. The ethical questions would be concerned with the rights of humans with respect to the rest of the individuals in nature: how should we, according to Spinoza, relate to the rest of nature of which we are only a part, and which has a mental life just as we do? The metaphysical questions are concerned with establishing reasons for the apparent hierarchy of

⁵¹ A similar, related, principle can be seen at work in Spinoza's account of the inadequacy of ideas.

⁵² This remark should not be read as a denial of the possession of animals of a specific nature. On the contrary, Spinoza repeatedly alludes to the natures of animals. For instance in 3p57s.

individuals in nature. How do we relate to other thinking individuals? In what way does the human mind differ from other thinking individuals? These latter issues will be the main topic of the remaining two chapters of this thesis.

3. Consciousness and Modal Complexity

3.1 The possibility of a selective theory of consciousness in the *Ethics*

Nature's structure, according to Spinoza's metaphysics, does not allow us to divide its stock of individuals into those things that have thought and those things that do not. There is a corresponding idea in God for every single thing, consequently every physical individual is at the same time a thinking individual. Scattered throughout nature, thought of as an infinite array of ideas, there are those thinking individuals that Spinoza calls minds; i.e., the ideational correlates to those bodies in nature that are human. If thinking individuals are as abundant as the infinitely many composite physical things observable in nature, and if nature is, as Spinoza says, "always the same", the question arises in what way non-human thinking individuals are similar or dissimilar to human minds.⁵³ In the previous chapters we have already seen that because of the uniformity of nature we can understand the formation and preservation of each thinking individual as highly similar. Every thinking individual is a collection of ideas, striving to preserve the most intimate features of the collection without which it would cease to exist. In connection with the human mind we gave an account of the collection of ideas as a structure of beliefs.

As we ourselves experience, many of the beliefs in our minds are beliefs that we are aware of; many ideas in our minds (if not all) are conscious ideas. Generally speaking it is far from ordinary to attribute consciousness to a very wide range of individuals existing in nature; if we even want to attribute it to other individuals besides human beings at all. Most of us tend to think of consciousness as a feature belonging solely to individuals with brain structures similar to that of humans. That is, on the whole, the majority of us (philosophers and laymen) probably tend to think of consciousness as a feature pertaining to those individuals that at least have a brain. Spinoza's metaphysics challenges us to review this intuition of ours. Within Spinoza's system having a brain is not in any way a prerequisite for having thoughts, i.e. ideas. However, having ideas does not have to mean being conscious. In light of Spinoza's panpsychism it is a pressing question whether consciousness is also a feature of the 'minds' of other non-human individuals. Or whether consciousness is a feature solely of the human mind.

Whether the answer to this question is positive depends on whether any of Spinoza's remarks concerning consciousness in the *Ethics* could constitute a selective theory of consciousness. That is, whether the *Ethics* contains a theory that explains which minds are conscious and which are not and particularly whether Spinoza restricts consciousness to the human mind and why this would

⁵³ Spinoza, *Ethics* 3 Preface.

be the case. Unfortunately, those passages in which Spinoza has something to say on the topic of consciousness are scarce and often not unambiguous. Consciousness is not a topic treated separately by Spinoza.⁵⁴ In the literature that deals with Spinoza's views on consciousness, the possibility of a more or less selective theory of consciousness often revolves around either one of two seemingly separate discussions present in distinct sections of the *Ethics*.⁵⁵ One of these discussions is concerned with ideas of ideas, the other has to do with the relative aptitude of the body. In the present section of this thesis I shall pass over these two interpretations fairly quickly, for I am of the opinion that they do not offer a clear account of a selective theory of consciousness. However, I do think that from what Spinoza has to say in the *Ethics* about consciousness, and also more importantly from what he says about the nature of ideas, we are able to construct a theory of consciousness which makes sense of the fact that the whole of nature is animated.⁵⁶ I will try to outline this theory of consciousness in section 3.2.

Employing such a notion as consciousness is obviously not without difficulties. It could be contested that there is no unanimous interpretation advocated by present-day philosophers (or scientists) as to what consciousness in fact is, or as to what we should understand by conscious awareness. It may be even more difficult to comprehend what Spinoza and other seventeenth century thinkers understood by consciousness, in relation with more present-day interpretations of the phenomenon. But this lies beyond the scope of this thesis. And as for the ambiguity in exactly defining consciousness, I believe that this only poses a problem for this chapter if we would incessantly make it one. That is to say, if we tediously commanded to know what kind of conscious awareness Spinoza is exactly describing (in modern understandings of the term) in every relevant passage in the *Ethics*, then I think we should abandon all hope of answering the largest part of questions concerning consciousness and Spinoza. For Spinoza himself appears to employ

⁵⁴ In modern day philosophy, consciousness is a substantial and established topic. But in seventeenth century philosophy 'consciousness' is only beginning to develop itself as a separate topic. This is reflected in the *Ethics*, where we can read 'consciousness' as on the verge of becoming a technical term. The places where the Latin word *conscientia* (or one of its forms), suitably translates into the modern-sense 'consciousness', are scarce. Furthermore, these occurrences do not yield ample resources for a full blown theory of consciousness. The term occurs in the Appendix to *Part One*, 2p35s, 3p2s, 3p9, 3p30, in the explanation of the first definition of the affects in *Part Three*, in the Preface to *Part Four*, 4p8, 4p19, 4p64; in the Appendix to *Part Four* XXXII, 5p31s, 5p34s, 5p39s and in 5p42s. However, when we examine the phenomenon consciousness in the *Ethics* we should not be guided solely by the occurrences of *conscientia*. We shall see that many other forms of describing awareness, such as knowing or perceiving (*cognitio, percipio*), are of vital importance.

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics* (1969); Bennett, *A study of Spinoza's Ethics* (1984); Nadler, "Spinoza and Consciousness" (2008), Garrett "Representation and consciousness in Spinoza's naturalistic theory of the imagination" (2008); Wilson, "Objects, Ideas, and "Minds": Comments on Spinoza's Theory of Mind" (1999); Lebuffe, "Theories about Consciousness in Spinoza's Ethics" (2010).

⁵⁶ Spinoza, *Ethica* 2p13s: "Nam ea, quæ hucusque ostendimus, admodum communia sunt, nec magis ad homines, quàm ad reliqua Individua pertinent, quæ omnia, quamvis diversis gradibus, animata tamen sunt."

consciousness in a variety of ways.⁵⁷ In this chapter I will understand 'being conscious' simply as having 'conscious states'. These 'conscious states' will for the most part be deliberately left indeterminate between raw sentience, on the one hand, and self-consciousness on the other.⁵⁸

A selective theory of consciousness by means of the theory of ideas of ideas, starts from two propositions in the *Ethics* in which Spinoza apparently connects this doctrine with consciousness: propositions 3p9 and 4p8. The last line of the demonstration of 3p9 reads: "since the mind (by IIP23) is necessarily conscious of itself through ideas of the body's affections, the mind (by P7) is conscious of its striving". Proposition 23 of *Part Two* is part of a cluster of propositions that explicitly deal with ideas of ideas. 4p8 reads: "The knowledge of good and evil is nothing but an affect of Joy or Sadness, insofar as we are conscious of it." The demonstration relies, in part, on 2p22 which is also part of the aforementioned cluster of propositions that deal with ideas of ideas. "And so knowledge of good and evil is nothing but an idea of joy or sadness which follows necessarily from the affect of joy or sadness itself (by IIP22)."⁵⁹ With the help of these two propositions one could infer that it is only through the idea of the idea of the affections of the body that the human mind has conscious awareness. However there are significant problems with this interpretation. Apart from the fact that the evidence is scarce, to say the least, this particular interpretation of ideas of ideas as being the only conscious modes in Spinoza's system is refuted by other instances of Spinoza's use of ideas of ideas.

The very first time ideas of ideas are mentioned in the *Ethics* is in 2p20. The existence of ideas of ideas is argued for on the grounds that in God there is necessarily an idea of everything that follows from his essence (2p3). Because ideas are also things following from God's essence, they are also represented in God's intellect by a 'second' idea. In 2p21s Spinoza tells us that this second idea is united to the first idea in the same way as this idea is united to the body. This means that the idea of the idea and the idea are the very same thing, they are identical. The idea of the idea, Spinoza says, in what appears to be the closest thing to a definition of ideas of ideas that the *Ethics* has to offer, "is nothing but the form of the idea insofar as this is considered as a mode of thinking without relation to the object". Jonathan Bennett takes this to mean that the idea of the idea is the idea considered as something primarily mental, a modification of thought, apart from its being a representation of an extended mode.⁶⁰ I think that this is correct. But what does Spinoza's further use of ideas of ideas in the *Ethics* tell us about the meaning of the definition from 2p21?

⁵⁷ Compare for instance Spinoza's use of the term in the first definition of the affects attached to *Part Three* of the *Ethics* and 5p39s and 5p42s.

⁵⁸ Steven Nadler, "Spinoza and Consciousness," *Mind* 117 (2008): 580.

⁵⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics*, 4p8.

⁶⁰ Bennett, *A study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 186-7.

Immediately following the definition, Spinoza says: “as soon as someone knows something, he thereby knows that he knows it, and at the same time knows that he knows, and so on, to infinity.” A similar remark in connection with ideas of ideas is made in 2p43. The proposition reads: “He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea and cannot doubt the truth of the thing”. The proposition is probably best read as Spinoza’s response to a possible skepticism of knowledge, but it is also insightful concerning ideas of ideas. In the demonstration of the proposition Spinoza says, after having referred to 2p20, “he who has an adequate idea, or who knows a thing truly, must at the same time have an adequate idea, or true knowledge, of his own knowledge. That is (as is manifest through itself), he must at the same time be certain.” Similarly in one of Spinoza’s earlier writings, the *Tractatus De Intellectus Emendatione*, he writes: “From this it is clear that certainty is nothing but the objective essence itself, i.e., the mode by which we are aware of the formal essence is certainty itself. And from this, again, it is clear that, for the certainty of the truth, no other sign is needed than having a true idea. For as we have shown, in order for me to know, it is not necessary to know that I know. From which, once more, it is clear that no one can know what the highest certainty is unless he has an adequate idea or objective essence of some thing. For certainty and an objective essence are the same thing.”⁶¹

After this brief overview of some of the uses of ideas of ideas in Spinoza’s writings, it appears to me that the idea of the idea as the form of the idea is, as an account of consciousness would have it, something like a reflective act; but it is nevertheless a reflective act that is already inherent in the ‘first’ idea, for the idea of the idea is nothing beyond or above the first idea. It is the perception of the ‘first’ idea as a particular thing in its own right. I think that this is what Spinoza means when he says that it is the form of the idea without relation to the object. It is the further awareness, above a primary awareness embodying the relation towards the object, that this prior awareness, i.e. the idea, is a certain piece of knowledge of which I am aware. In this sense, the fact that I know that I perceive this particular triangle to have three sides, is nothing beyond the idea in my mind that the triangle has three sides. The idea of the idea is the further awareness of the perception, or knowledge, without immediate reference to the particular triangle, the object of the idea. As such, ideas of ideas should be associated with a mode’s awareness, but I think that Spinoza did not intend the idea of idea doctrine to account for the awareness or conscious belief one has that constitutes the ‘first’ perception; this is simply the idea. It seems that, using Spinoza’s words, in order to know that one knows, one must first already know. In connection with Spinoza’s use of ideas of ideas in 4p8 we could say, for instance, that because of the fact that I know that I experience water as quenching my thirst, I deem water to be something good.

⁶¹ Spinoza “Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect.” In *The Collected Works of Spinoza. Volume 1*, trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), §35.

More importantly, there is a grave difficulty already inherent in the very foundations on which any selective theory of consciousness on the basis of ideas of ideas should build. It is a problem that raises itself in the very proposition in which Spinoza introduces ideas of ideas. This proposition, 2p20, lends its force from 2p3, which states that there is an idea in God of every thing. Consequently the restriction of ideas of ideas to the human mind that is apparent in 2p20 immediately dissolves: there is an idea in God for every idea, not solely for the human mind.⁶² The fact that 2p20 and the following propositions (2p21-23) are about humans does not indicate a restriction of ideas of ideas solely to the human mind. Rather, this might merely be a focusing in on the human mind, amidst many other modes. There are no means, solely on the basis of the ideas of ideas doctrine, to attribute consciousness to the human mind only or to restrict consciousness to a number of modifications.⁶³

A second cluster of propositions that might account for a different theory of selective consciousness is concerned with the relative excellence of one mind over the others. This cluster encompasses the following propositions: (5p6s,) 5p31s, 5p39s, 5p42s, and they are connected with Spinoza's remarks on the relative excellence of one body over another in 2p13s. According to a theory of consciousness working with these propositions, the excellence of a mind is tied to the relative excellence, or aptitude of its corresponding body. Excellence then is tied to consciousness, on the authority of 5p39s, with the result that the conscious awareness of a mind is relative to the excellence of its body.

Although I do think that this conclusion is on the right track, it is not as easily and quickly drawn from the propositions mentioned above as presented by these brief inferences. Looking at these propositions, but also looking at the supposed evidence for a selective theory of consciousness via ideas of ideas, we observe that in none of the propositions mentioned above Spinoza is directly concerned with establishing a selective theory of consciousness. The occurrences of 'consciousness' in the *Ethics* are, not surprisingly, mostly concerned with epistemological or moral issues.⁶⁴ The term occurs in propositions which have something to say about the overall inadequate awareness of the human mind of the world and of itself. They highlight how man's perception of things is generally inadequate, and how a transition can and should take place towards a more adequate perception of things and God; if it were not for the fact that the adequate perception of things is most of the time

⁶² One could perhaps speculate that these ideas of ideas are all in Gods, but not in the 'minds' of all these individuals. But that the ideas of ideas of the human mind, on the contrary, are in the human mind. I do not see any textual ground for maintaining such a distinction on account of the ideas of ideas doctrine solely.

⁶³ An authoritative treatment of the shortcomings of an ideas of ideas account of selective consciousness is given by Margaret Wilson in her essay 'Objects, Ideas, and "Minds": Comments on Spinoza's Theory of Mind' (1999).

⁶⁴ For a more extensive treatment of Spinoza's use of 'consciousness' in epistemological contexts see Michael Lebuffe's (2010) "Theories about Consciousness in Spinoza's Ethics".

blocked by inadequate perception. The lack of an explicit selective theory of consciousness, which would attribute conscious perception solely to the human mind invites us to draw the conclusion that Spinoza would not have thought much of any attempt to restrict consciousness to the human mind. This is, I think, a correct conclusion. Moreover, if it were not correct it would, I believe, turn out to be a violation of Spinoza's own naturalism. It is more plausible to assume that Spinoza saw consciousness as a feature of nature necessarily distributed throughout nature and not pertaining to the human mind only. However it remains unfortunate that the *Ethics* is relatively silent on the topic of consciousness, for Spinoza's metaphysics does seem to require a theory of consciousness. Spinoza at least requires a satisfactory theory that would admit of degrees of consciousness between different modifications of the attribute of thought.

3.2 Construing a theory of consciousness by means of modal complexity

The lack of a selective theory of consciousness together with Spinoza's overall naturalistic motives do count as sufficient evidence that Spinoza did believe consciousness to be a feature of other thinking individuals besides the human mind. And therefore the opening questions of section 3.1 are answered. However, before moving on to a feature of the human mind which, I believe, Spinoza did see as a prerogative of the human mind, I would like to attempt to construct a possible theory of consciousness according to Spinoza's system which would account for something like a degree of awareness among nature's individuals. It is not in fact a theory he explicitly offers, for he offers none explicitly, but I do think that, if he had been forced to offer a coherent theory of gradational awareness, it would have been along the lines of the following paragraphs.

A satisfactory theory of consciousness consistent with Spinoza's metaphysics (and common sense) should account for at least these three things: it should, first of all, offer a plausible explanation of a varying degree of consciousness between modifications of different natures. Secondly, it should account for the human modification's reputed high place on the hierarchical consciousness scale. And third, it should explain that although there is an idea in my mind of everything constituting my body, I am nevertheless not aware of everything that is happening in my body.

I venture to say that any theory that successfully meets these three criteria will rely on three idiosyncrasies of Spinoza's metaphysical apparatus: the relative complexity of individuals, the relative power of an individual and the mind-relative⁶⁵ inadequacy or adequacy of an idea. A theory of

⁶⁵ I borrow this term from Della Rocca's *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem*. But similar speculations about the relative adequacy or inadequacy of ideas are also discernable in Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics*, 177-182.

consciousness embodying these three aspects will unmistakably remind us of the treatment of ideas in paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3. I do not see this as a surprising result. It is the observation that establishing a theory of consciousness in Spinoza should be tackled similarly to a theory of perception or knowledge, i.e. by means of (the nature of) ideas.

In 5p39s we read: “he who has a body capable of a great many things, has a mind which considered only in itself is very much conscious of itself, and of God, and of things”. And, “[b]ecause human bodies are capable of a great many things, there is no doubt but what they can be of such a nature that they are related to minds which have a great knowledge of themselves and of God”. Apparently, as Spinoza’s wordings suggest, there is an undeniable connection between a body’s capability and its mind’s awareness. But how is this connection established? I believe that in order to understand the connection, we have to view it in light of Spinoza’s theory of the mind’s perception of things. I think we see clear evidence that this is the right assumption in 2p13s, where we read:

And so to determine what is the difference between the human mind and the others, and how it surpasses them, it is necessary for us, as we have said, to know the nature of its object, i.e., of the human body. I cannot explain this here, nor is that necessary for the things I wish to demonstrate. Nevertheless, I say this in general, that in proportion as a body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once. And in proportion as the actions of a body depend more on itself alone, and as other bodies concur with it less in acting, so its mind is more capable of understanding distinctly.

Furthermore, in 2p14 Spinoza demonstrates that the human mind “is capable of perceiving a great many things, and is the more capable, the more its body can be disposed in a great many ways”. Here, and in 2p13s, perception is linked to the body’s ability of doing many things, whereas in 5p39s the body’s greater ability is linked to a greater consciousness and knowledge. It is no coincidence that both perception and consciousness are connected to the same feature. An increase in the body’s ability is matched by an increase in the mind’s perception which will, in effect, be simultaneously matched by an increase in consciousness. But, a plausible Spinozistic theory of consciousness, has to account for a difference between perceiving something (as used in 2p12) and being conscious of something; between having an idea, on the one hand, and having a conscious idea on the other hand. However, this difference does not rest on ideas being of a different kind. Furthermore, we should resist thinking that consciousness is an all or nothing deal; things can be said to be conscious in a greater or lesser degree. The difference between conscious and non-conscious (or barely conscious) ideas, and whether they are conscious in a particular mind, rests on how these ideas will

relate to other ideas in and outside of the particular mind (or thinking individual) that is said to be conscious of them (or not). I will try to explain this further in the paragraphs below by appealing to Spinoza's understanding of adequate and inadequate ideas. Ultimately, I think we have to say that (in God) there really is no such thing as an unconscious idea. The partial understanding that might constitute the thinking aspect of some individual is an idea in God, but as an idea in God it is no longer this partial understanding, but a fully adequate idea. In a way we can regard the partial understandings, or inadequate ideas, of lower organisms (and of the human mind, for that matter) as unreal in comparison with the adequate understandings that these ideas all are in the intellect of God. As such, we should, I think, also regard unconscious ideas as being confused representations of true and fully conscious expressions in God's intellect: in God there are only conscious ideas.

We should now examine Spinoza's account of the inadequacy of the mind's perception of the body and its adequate perceptions, so that we will be able to understand how the human mind will be both conscious and unconscious concerning several aspects of its body and how inadequate perception relates to explaining (degrees of) consciousness throughout nature.

The mind's ideas are the mental correlates of the modifications of the body. Or, as Spinoza puts it in 2p12, the body is perceived by the mind. But it is clear from experience that we are not aware of our own body in great detail, and it would be nonsensical to think that Spinoza conceived this otherwise. In fact, we can see Spinoza providing proof for the observation that we have no perfect knowledge of our body in a later section of *Part Two* of the *Ethics*: in 2p19 we read that only insofar as the body is affected does the mind know its body and only insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body does the mind know itself. This means that the mind is aware of its body only insofar as its body is affected. Furthermore these affections of the body will generally, if not always, be effects of external causes.⁶⁶ To understand why this is the case we have to remind ourselves that according to Spinoza the mind perceives external bodies only through modifications of its own body, brought about by external bodies.⁶⁷ The perception of the external body will involve the nature of the human body as well as the nature of the external body. What this means for the mind's composition is that those ideas parallel to the modifications of the body brought about by external bodies will be representative of both the modification of the body and the external body. Thus the human mind only knows its body insofar as it is affected and then only confusedly. But I

⁶⁶ Defining 'external' in 'external causes' in terms of being located in or outside a particular mode is not without difficulties. For instance, Seneca's idea (an example from *Ethics* 4p20s) to take his own life would according to Spinoza be defined as external or alien (cf. 3p10) to Seneca. However, this idea is still in Seneca's mind. We should therefore define an idea as external when it is a decrease (or increase) of power which is not the result of an action of the mind. That is, an idea is caused externally when it cannot be understood through the mind alone.

⁶⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p17 and 2p26.

venture to say that the mind can also have conscious awareness through an internal act. An affection of the body and its parallel idea can also be the result of an action of the body or the mind.⁶⁸

Perception, or knowledge, is either inadequate or adequate, so also, logically, conscious perception is either inadequate or adequate. That is, I am aware of myself and everything either in a confused way or in a clear and distinct way. However, it remains questionable whether I can be or become aware of my body in an adequate way. Propositions 2p27-29 seem to suggest that the mind is only aware of itself and its body through ideas of the imagination; thus the awareness a mind has of its body will always be inadequate. But, it is without doubt that the human mind is conscious insofar as it has adequate ideas. 5p31s can hardly be interpreted in any other way.⁶⁹ Maybe, and this is at this time nothing more than a suggestion, perception through adequate ideas cannot constitute knowledge of one's own body for the following reason: Spinoza sees common notions as the stepping stones of reason and therefore of adequate knowledge.⁷⁰ And in 2p37 we read that what is common to all cannot constitute the essence of a singular thing. Consequently we can have adequate knowledge of certain features of bodies and thereby adequate knowledge of (aspects of) our own bodies, but we can never know the body in an adequate way. There is just too much inadequate perception involved. However this does not fully resolve the tension between 2p28 on the one hand and 5p39s and 5p42s on the other. Maybe the mind can have adequate knowledge of its body through intuitive knowledge.

Nevertheless, the body is either acted on, in which case there is inadequate perception, or the body acts, in which case there is adequate perception. Both ways of perceiving increase when the body is more extensive, as we were able to read in the quote from 2p13 above. This means that a more complex and extensive body will be able to be affected in more ways than a less complex body. That is, it will have greater perception of external bodies than a less complex body. And a more complex body will be able to act in more ways than a less complex body, i.e., its mind will have the ability to form more adequate ideas than the mind corresponding to a lesser complex body. I think that we could understand Spinoza here as saying something like this: individuals possessing a keen sense of sight and touch, for instance, will be able to take in more information and more diversely so than individuals possessing only the sense of touch, this will reflect in a difference in perception between these individuals; which makes at least some common sense. But I think that we may even understand Spinoza as referring to a difference in structural complexity on a deeper physiological, maybe even neurological level. Of course Spinoza would have been unaware of the specific processes going on in the brain, but he does display a keen insight concerning the importance of the make up

⁶⁸ For evidence, see Spinoza's *Ethics*, 3Def3. See also *Ethics* 5p7.

⁶⁹ As well as *Ethics* 5p39s and 5p42s.

⁷⁰ This will be dealt with more fully in Chapter Four of this Thesis.

of the human brain when it comes to matters of taste and character.⁷¹ I think that we can safely say that Spinoza acknowledged the fact that the complexity of the human physique, and of the human brain in particular, is important in explaining the richness of the mental life of human beings.

However, the affinity between perception and consciousness in Spinoza's theory of mind might not have become fully clear yet. Why does perceiving more also mean being conscious of more things? The answer, as simple as it may sound, firmly rooted in Spinoza's theory of mind, is that the only form available to Spinoza for a mind's 'being conscious of x' is for it to 'have an idea of x'. I venture to say that having ideas in Spinoza is just being conscious of things. But the degree of conscious awareness of a particular mind is related to the particular ideas that mind contains; and will vary from fully self-conscious to barely conscious at all. This will be explained below.

But there appears to be a further problem with explaining (degrees of) consciousness through the physical complexity and aptitude of particular bodies, for it looks as if we are explaining a mental feature by means of physical constitutions or causes.⁷² If this were true, we would be neglecting the fact that according to Spinoza we cannot explain a mental feature by appealing to physical features. However, I do think that we can make sense of the body's aptitude on a mental level, and thereby we can salvage our attempt to explain consciousness through modal complexity.

The physical complexity of the body necessarily corresponds to a complexity of ideas under the attribute of thought. This follows from Spinoza's theory of individuals as treated in earlier chapters. In Chapter 1 we already discussed 1ax4: "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause". We also saw that Spinoza takes this axiom to mean that the degree of comprehension involved in a particular idea depends on whether the idea that has caused it is comprehended too. Inadequate ideas are confused for the particular reason that they are caused by something of which the mind has only a partial grasp; the cause, external to the mind, is in that case not separately understood by the mind, it is only comprehended through the inadequate idea that has been caused by it. Therefore Spinoza says that an inadequate idea is like a conclusion without premises.⁷³ Every idea in the mind relates in a similar way to other ideas. Every idea, as a piece of information, is dependent on other pieces of information for its explanation. This is how we should understand 1ax4, and mental causation, according Spinoza, in general. When the causes of a particular idea are 'located' outside of the mind, the idea in the mind will be inadequate. Whenever the causes of the idea are grasped by the mind, i.e. whenever the ideas that caused the other idea are in the mind, the mind understands the caused idea and its causes. Therefore it understands how the first idea came about. This idea will be adequate in the mind, for it is like the conclusion of

⁷¹ For this, see especially the Appendix to *Part One* of the *Ethics*.

⁷² Ultimately Spinoza might not be entirely guilt free of a similar error when he himself tries to explain perception through the affections of the body.

⁷³ Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p28.

certain premises understood and carried out by the mind. The content of a particular idea in a particular mind is a function of the other ideas present in that mind. Thus whether an awareness is clear or confused will depend on the other ideas constituting a particular mind. This is the only way in which we can start to make some sense of the fact that, as Spinoza maintained, one idea can be inadequate in my mind whilst adequate in God's intellect. The larger the mind is, the more ideas it contains, the greater the system of knowledge this particular mind embodies is, the bigger its share of unconfused ideas. This might sound somewhat trivial but it is, I think, how Spinoza might have envisaged it: a holistic account of the mental.⁷⁴ It is reflected in Spinoza's account of the individual body as a cooperating aggregate: an individual is constituted through the cooperation of the parts composing the body. Something similar might be said of the mental individual: only through the 'cooperation' of ideas, in other words, only through tying in together and embedding individual 'pieces' of knowledge in a larger whole, there is formed one mental individual.

We now begin to see how consciousness is intimately linked to a thing's complexity. The complexity account offers a quantitative explanation of consciousness and with it we are perfectly able to make sense of why a human being is more conscious than, for instance, an amoeba. However, the account still lacks specificity. It appears to me that there is still at least one important aspect of the mental life of an (human) individual that needs to be explained in greater detail, namely the difference in intensity between different ideas in one mind. Why would a less confused idea be more conscious than a confused idea? Why would my adequate perception of God be more conscious than any random imagination? Although we could probably go a long way in answering this question by means of the holistic account of the mental explained above, we will need to incorporate one more aspect of Spinoza's philosophy into the complexity-account in order to fully explain the mental phenomenon of differences in the intensity of awareness, namely the power of an idea.

There is a clearly discernable and important line of thought in the *Ethics* that will help us explain consciousness more fully and it concerns reality and power. Throughout the *Ethics* we can find evidence that the being or reality of a thing is measured by (or even equated with) its power to sustain its current existence.⁷⁵ To see how this relates to consciousness and the body's complexity, we will have to begin with 5p39s. Here, as we have seen, consciousness is anchored to a body's ability to do (many) things. We also saw that something similar to 5p39s is enforced in 2p13s, but here excellence is tied to the body's greater ability. The excellence of a thing (in case of 2p13s, of a mind) expresses a thing's reality. Furthermore, saying that a thing contains more reality is just saying

⁷⁴ See also Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem*, 68-77.

⁷⁵ This interpretation is inspired by Don Garrett, "Representation and consciousness in Spinoza's naturalistic theory of the imagination," in *Interpreting Spinoza: critical essays*, ed. Charlie Huenemann (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4-25.

that a thing expresses a certain degree of perfection.⁷⁶ Because Spinoza equates reality and perfection, the following becomes very interesting for us: “by perfection in general I shall, as I have said, understand reality, i.e., the essence of each thing insofar as it exists and produces an effect, having no regard to its duration.”⁷⁷ A thing’s ability to bring about certain other things is an expression of a thing’s power.⁷⁸ “By virtue and power I understand the same thing, i.e. (by III P7), virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very essence, *or* nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone.”⁷⁹ The essence of a thing is a thing’s striving to persevere, as we have seen. This is also clear from the reference to 3p7 in the definition. When we combine these findings, we get the following picture: a thing’s consciousness is relative to a thing’s excellence or reality and relates to a thing’s degree of complexity. The excellence or reality of a thing is measured by its power, from which we can infer that the conscious awareness of a thing will be relative to a thing’s power. More powerful ideas, are more conscious.

From this conclusion we can clearly see why Spinoza thought adequate ideas to be more conscious than ideas of the imagination. Adequate ideas are by definition an expression of the power of the mind. Whereas inadequate ideas express the mind’s being acted on, i.e., they express the mind’s lack of power.

An individual’s power, or essence, which is its striving to persevere in its being expresses, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, its ability to remain functioning as a unified cause in relation to its environment. We can easily understand that this will involve an individual’s capability to respond accurately to outside influences, i.e., to external forces which will be either beneficial or harmful to the individual. Together with what we have said above we are now able to see that, consciousness, complexity and an individual’s conatus are intimately linked. The power of an individual expresses the reality of an individual, but according to Spinoza it is also a measure of a thing’s conscious awareness, and because the reality of an individual is his essence, i.e. its striving to persevere in existence, a thing’s power will for the greatest part depend on how an individual is able to maintain itself as a unity. We can imagine how this will depend on an individual’s responsive capabilities towards its environment and we can assume that Spinoza understood these capabilities as a function of the complexity of the individual.

It remains one of the most fascinating aspects of Spinoza’s metaphysics that one can start working on a problem from one angle and then realize, after a while, that other routes also might have been taken in answering it. But that all these routes nonetheless do seem to culminate in one

⁷⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics* 2Def6: “By reality and perfection I understand the same thing”.

⁷⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics* 4 Preface.

⁷⁸ Compare *Ethics* 1p34 and 1p36.

⁷⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics* 4D8.

single answer or explanatory mechanism. We began this exposition on consciousness with the complexity of the body, worked our way to a holistic account of the mental and ended with a discussion on Spinoza's notion of power. But I guess we could have started from either one of these notions and would have ended up with roughly the same result. One reason for this could be Spinoza's repeated tendency to equate terms in the *Ethics* (through the often used conjunction *sive*). But I think that in this case it is an instantiation of an admirable philosophical rigor on Spinoza's part in metaphysical matters.

In the introduction to this paragraph we stated that a satisfactory theory of consciousness for Spinoza should accommodate at least three important issues, namely, a degree of consciousness varying between individuals of different natures, secondly, the human mind's significant degree of awareness relative to other individuals and third, the awareness the human mind has of its body. We are now able to see how these conditions are met.

A varying degree of consciousness is established through a varying degree of complexity between individuals of different and similar natures. Physical and mental complexity are constitutive of a thing's ability, and therefore of a thing's power to respond to its environment in various ways, as to preserve its being. The complexity accommodates for the variety of ways in which a thing is responsive to its environment. It is not just a matter of the successful preservation of an individual that constitutes the manner and degree of consciousness of that particular individual. But it is the variety of ways in which an individual exercises its power that is fundamental to its awareness. This criterion is necessary in order to avoid the conclusion that a stone is more conscious than a human being, because it more successfully preserves its existence of a longer period of time; the durational aspect of the mode is of little importance.

We can also see why human beings are significantly more conscious than for instance snails or trees: humans are infinitely more complex than these modifications and are responsive to their environment in many more ways.

Finally, we can see why the human mind is not aware of every aspect of its body, although it has an idea of everything that happens to its body. The human mind is aware of its body insofar as it is affected (by other bodies). In 2p24 Spinoza says: "The parts composing the human body pertain to the essence of the body itself only insofar as they communicate their motions to one another in a certain fixed manner (see the Definition after L3C), and not insofar as they can be considered as individuals, without relation to the human body." I think that we have to understand Spinoza as saying that only insofar as particular changes in the body have significant consequences for the body as a whole, the mind will be aware of particular changes to the body. Only when the amount of glucose available to my body drops to a critical level will I start feeling flimsy. When a sufficient level of glucose is available to the body, I will hardly be aware of the processes maintaining the status quo

of my body, so to speak. Furthermore, 2p27 reads: "The idea of any affection of the human body does not involve adequate knowledge of the human body itself." The human mind is only aware of its body through the affections of its body, this means that the human mind perceives its own body through inadequate ideas. Thus the ideas composing the mind's perception of its body are ideas of the imagination (2p19, 2p27, 2p28), which confusedly represent the state of my own body and the state of external bodies. I believe that this inadequate awareness of our own body is responsible for our overall unawareness of the specific processes going on in our body.

It is tempting to read the distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas, as a distinction between good and bad perception. In that case having inadequate ideas would always be a bad thing, it seems, and consequently the mind should always strive to substitute them for adequate ideas. It is obvious that Spinoza gives reasons why we might come to regard the distinction between inadequate and adequate ideas in this manner. He clearly holds that adequate perception is better than inadequate perception. Adequate ideas are true, whereas inadequate ideas are only partially true, adequate ideas are more conscious than inadequate ideas, and adequate ideas are the only means through which we can acquire a truly fulfilling life. However, in light of our discussion of the mind's perception of its own body, we might want to rethink the appraisal of the distinction between inadequate and adequate ideas, for it is not as clear cut as it would seem. It seems to me that the way in which the human mind is aware of its body is pretty efficient most of the time. Only when something threatens to go seriously wrong within our body, are we made aware of a deficiency. We seem to do well without having a direct and detailed knowledge of our own physique. Furthermore, I cannot but shiver at the thought of what it must be like to perceive one's own body like an omnipotent surgeon. This motivates me to think that for us humans it might not be a bad thing at all that we perceive our own bodies inadequately. Nevertheless, we should be cautious in these matters for we are obviously not aware of the possible benefits of perceiving our own bodies adequately. But I think that these considerations do show that in case of the perception of one's own body we should be reluctant to appraise inadequate ideas as merely negative.

4. Reason and the Human Mind

There are no compelling reasons to attribute consciousness solely to the human mind. On the contrary, it is more natural to interpret Spinoza as having believed that there are many other kinds of individuals in nature that might be less complex than the human mind but are nonetheless also consciously aware of their environment and maybe even of themselves in a manner similar to the way in which the human mind is aware of itself and its environment. In the present chapter, however, it is my intention to come to understand a feature that is characteristic of the human mind, with respect to lower organisms. This will be the human mind's ability to form adequate ideas, i.e. reason. In section 4.1 I will give an interpretation of what it means for the mind to reason. In section 4.2 I will try to provide (textual) evidence that, according to Spinoza, reason is indeed a feature unique to the human mind with respect to individuals of a lower mental and physical complexity than humans.

4.1 Reason and the common notions

As long as the mind perceives things solely from the ways in which its body is affected by other bodies, the ideas comprising the human mind will all be inadequate. Or, as Spinoza expresses it in 2p29c, the mind will perceive things through the common order of nature. When the mind perceives things through the common order of nature, it is said to be "determined externally, from fortuitous encounters with things, to regard this or that".⁸⁰ Being determined externally indicates the mind's dependence on outside influences and emphasizes the mind's relative weakness in comparison with its surroundings. It is opposed to being "determined internally". The prototype of the latter is God: God is *causa sui*. Everything that happens or follows from (or in) God, can be understood through God's nature alone. Consequently, for the human mind to be determined internally, means for its action to be the result solely of the mind's own power; its ideas can be understood through it alone. When an idea in the mind is the result of an action of the mind, i.e., when an idea is an effect of the mind and the mind is its adequate cause, then this idea will be adequate in the mind. When an idea in the mind is the result of other causes besides the human mind, thus when it cannot be understood solely through (other ideas present in) the mind, then the idea in this mind is inadequate.

Given Spinoza's metaphysics, it is hard to understand how the human mind could ever be the adequate cause of its own actions. It is hard to understand how an idea could ever be explained

⁸⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p29s.

through the human mind alone. Let me explain. We have seen that, being 'caused by', 'being understood through' and 'being explained by' are, according to Spinoza's use of these terms, virtually interchangeable. Thus, if an idea is to be understood solely through the human mind, this amounts to saying that the idea will have to be caused solely by that human mind; this means for it to be fully explicable through other pieces of information or knowledge already in the human mind. The human mind consist of but a relatively small part of the infinitely many ideas that together constitute Gods intellect. Moreover, every idea ultimately involves the concept of the attribute of thought through which it is understood.⁸¹ How does this idea come to be in the mind in the first place? Is this idea already in the mind, before it starts reasoning? It cannot come from outside the mind, for then it would no longer be adequate. Immediately we can see the grave difficulties these considerations pose for Spinoza's philosophy of mind. It appears that the standard of adequacy asks of the mind that it is self sufficient. That is, that it can operate without relying on anything outside the human mind. But the only thing that can be truly self sufficient in this manner, one would say, is God.

We arrive at the same difficulty through different, though strongly related, considerations. An idea will be inadequate in the mind when "God has this or that idea, not only insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind, but insofar as he also has the idea of another thing together with the human mind".⁸² The occurrence of the inadequate idea in the mind is explained through the fact that the other idea is not in the mind, but is in God. The inadequate idea in the mind is only the partial story, so to speak. The mind is only aware of the effect without knowledge of the cause. "The knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause."⁸³ An idea is adequate when the idea that causes this first idea is also in the mind. But together 1ax4 and 2p11c result in a very strong criterion, which, it appears, can never be met by any finite mind. Every idea, being the effect of some cause, involves the knowledge of another idea, without which according to Spinoza's 1ax4 the former cannot be understood adequately. At some point, it appears to me, the boundaries of the mind in explaining one idea through another will have to be crossed. The result of 1ax4 is an infinite series of ideas involving one another, the knowledge of which can never be in the finite human mind, but only in God('s intellect), so it seems. It appears as though an idea can never be adequate in the human mind. But maybe Spinoza would have thought that the involvement of ideas expressed in 1ax4 stops at a certain point, however such a stop would be unacceptably arbitrary. Or maybe we could escape the difficulties above when we imagine Spinoza to have thought that 1ax4 does express a continuous involvement of ideas, but an involvement that is confined to one mind only: ideas are said to depend on each other, but the ideas that they depend on are

⁸¹ Spinoza, *Ethics* 1p15.

⁸² Spinoza, *Ethics* 2p11c.

⁸³ Spinoza, *Ethics* 1ax4.

necessarily confined to the same mind. However, that Spinoza thought of his causal axiom in this manner appears to be contradicted both by the involvement of all ideas in God's intellect and by Spinoza's account of the inadequacy of ideas, where the inadequate idea involves the nature of an idea outside of the mind.

If the human mind is ultimately incapable of forming adequate ideas, then this would deal a devastating blow to Spinoza's ethical project. Our salvation and freedom lies in our ability to act by means of adequate ideas. Our slavery consists in our mind's being governed by passions, i.e. by inadequate ideas. If humans are incapable of forming adequate ideas, then any form of peace of mind will lie forever out of reach.

Aware of this difficulty, Spinoza offers an alternative to perceiving things from the common order of nature. We are not able to have adequate knowledge of external bodies (2p25), nor of our own body (2p26), nor of our mind (2p29), through the ideas of the affections of the body. But we are able to form adequate ideas of that which is common to the human body and the bodies by which it is affected (2p39). These "common notions" (2p40s2) appear to be the way out of the common order of nature, by which we transcend, as it were, our continuous slavery to outside forces. But what is it that these ideas are the ideas of?

We can rephrase this question and ask: what are the (only) truly universal aspects in Spinoza's metaphysics? We should emphasize the words 'truly universal' in this question, for Spinoza makes it clear in the first scholium to proposition 40 that the abstract universals of the Aristotelian philosophers, such as genus and species, are confused ideas of the imagination. Nor could that which is common among individuals be an essence. Essences, or what is the same, natures, can be like each other (something to which we shall return later in this chapter), but I think 3p7 decisively indicates that essences are singular. It is best to follow Spinoza's own reference in 2p37, where he explicitly addresses that what is common in all things. Here he refers to the second lemma of the physical excursion in between proposition 13 and 14 of *Part Two* of the *Ethics*. The demonstration of this lemma reads: "all bodies agree in that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute (by D1), and in that they can move now more slowly, now more quickly, and absolutely, that now they move, now they are at rest." The concept of the attribute through which a particular thing is conceived, is common to all things conceivable under that attribute. This makes perfectly good Spinozistic sense.⁸⁴ However, Spinoza also mentions motion and rest as something in which all bodies agree. Motion and rest are two of the immediate infinite modes of the attribute of extension (Ep. 64). The most plausible interpretation of the infinite modes known to me is that they are laws of

⁸⁴ Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics* 1Def4, 1Def5 and 1p15.

nature.⁸⁵ Besides God's attributes, the infinite modes are the only things in Spinoza's metaphysics that could fit the bill as something that is equally in the whole and in the parts of each and every thing, like motion and rest is. Consequently I find it quite convincing that Spinoza would have conceived these commonalities among things (in 2p37-2p39) to be like pervasive laws governing the behavior of modes.

But how does their being common in all things result in our having adequate ideas of them? From Spinoza's demonstrations of 2p38 and 39 we are supposed to picture this in the following way. When the human body is affected by another body through that which it has in common with the human body (and all other bodies), for instance through motion, then the mind will have an adequate idea of this common property of the human body. The force of the argument, it seems, does not lie in the direct evidence that we are capable of forming ideas solely from the power of our own minds, rather it lies in the underlying motivation that we cannot possibly perceive this common property inadequately. For there is no way in which we can be confused about the nature of this property: it is manifest in the human body, the affecting body and in the affection of the human body. The standard Spinozistic error-mechanism, whereby we confusedly represent both the human body and the external body through the affections of the human body, and wrongly consider our imaginations as accurate perceptions of external objects, is annulled. No matter in what way or by what kind of body the human body is affected, as long as it is affected through a common property of bodies, it will be able to represent this commonality in an adequate way.

This demonstration of 2p39 and the demonstration of 2p38 are not without their difficulties. It is pretty clear what Spinoza wants these demonstrations to prove, but I am not sure how he gets there. It appears to me that Spinoza (whether wittingly or unwittingly) slightly diverts from his usual understanding of adequacy and inadequacy when it comes to the perception of common notions. It seems, especially in 2p39, that here an idea in the mind is not adequate when it is caused solely by the mind as such, but when the mind perceives something that is equally in the whole and in the part of each thing. But by Spinoza's regular definition, in order for the mind to have an adequate idea, it should not rely on affections brought about by things external to the mind. But this is exactly what Spinoza appears to be saying in 2p39. "If something is common to, and peculiar to, the human body and certain external bodies by which the human body is usually affected, and is equally in the part and in the whole of each of them, its idea will also be adequate in the mind." However, one could say that what Spinoza meant to emphasize in 2p39 is the following: it is precisely through the fact that the body is affected by something which it has in common with affecting bodies, that it need not rely

⁸⁵ Yirmiyahu Yovel, "The Second Kind of Knowledge and the Removal of Error," in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind: Papers Presented at The Second Jerusalem Conference (Ethica II)*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 98-99; Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*.

on outside influences for the perception of this common property; the mind is able to represent this common property through the fact that it is also a quality of the human body. I do think that this is what Spinoza had in mind. However, it does seem to contradict earlier propositions of *Part Two*, especially 2p19, where Spinoza says: “The human mind does not know the human body itself, nor does it know that it exists, except through ideas of affections by which the body is affected.”

We glimpsed in the previous chapter that Spinoza believed that the human mind can be conscious of, at least, some aspects of its own existence in an adequate way. But when he demonstrates in what way the human mind can have adequate ideas, in 2p37-39 (through common notions), I am not sure whether the demonstration is a successful one. Nevertheless, apart from these difficulties, I do think that we can clearly see the importance of the common notions for Spinoza’s ethical project. We read in 2p44c2 that “the foundations of reason are notions (by P38) which explain those things that are common to all, and which (by P37) do not explain the essence of any singular thing”. And from the ideas of reason the mind will be able to proceed to the knowledge of the essences of singular things, wherein the key to our ultimate blessedness lies.⁸⁶ Without the mind’s ability to form these ‘first’ or ‘primary’ adequate ideas, it would lose the ability of forming adequate ideas altogether, because through the ideas of that which is common among things the mind sidesteps, as it were, the continuous formation of inadequate ideas. And Spinoza thought that whatever follows from one of these adequate ideas of reason is also adequate (2p40).

However, 2p29s can be interpreted as distinguishing a way of forming ideas of reason other than through common notions:

I say expressly that the mind has, not an adequate, but only a confused [...] knowledge, of itself, of its own body, and of external bodies, so long as it perceives things from the common order of nature, i.e., 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.

This is not the only proposition in the *Ethics* in which Spinoza emphasizes how the deductive power of the mind may lead to the formation of adequate ideas. However, I believe that, in order for the mind to deduce adequate ideas through the comparison of things, it will have to have some

⁸⁶ Intuitive knowledge, as the third kind of knowledge is called by Spinoza, proceeds from an idea of reason, namely from an adequate idea of an attribute of God, to adequate ideas of singular things (*Ethics*, 2p40s2, 5p28, 5p36).

adequate ideas already present. For the mind cannot deduce adequate ideas from inadequate ideas, because in that case, I think, we should conclude that the idea that is deduced would still rely on the imaginations of the mind and would therefore be inadequate. Thus reason's power of comparing and examining things presupposes the common notions. Still, there is intuitive appeal in the thought that reason is a process that relies very little on external input, especially when compared with sensing, and would therefore be done from within the mind. We should understand Spinoza as emphasizing this ability or power of the mind when he equates reason with having adequate ideas. I believe that it is this juxtaposition of sensing and reasoning that inspired Spinoza's account of the inadequacy or adequacy of ideas. In experiencing the world around us, we appear to be at the mercy of objects working in on our senses, things that are beyond our control. In opposition, when reasoning, Spinoza will have thought, we rely solely upon the power of our own mind.

Our concern here is not with the ethical side of Spinoza's theory of mind and although it is probably almost inseparably connected with Spinoza's notion of mind, we should focus our attention on other issues more closely related to the topic of this thesis. Spinoza clearly thought that the human mind is capable of reasoning. That is, he believed the human mind to have adequate ideas: "The essence of the mind is constituted by adequate and by inadequate ideas".⁸⁷ In connection with this, we need to raise the following question: are other thinking individuals, besides humans, capable of reasoning according Spinoza?

The question above is slightly complicated by another question, namely, what would count as a thinking individual according to Spinoza? This is a familiar question by now. And we have made considerable advances in answering this question. However, we have mainly focused our attention on those thinking individuals, or organisms, that we regard as of a lower capability and mental power than humans: cats, ants, plants, etc. We have not frequently raised questions concerning the possibility of higher or more complex individuals than ourselves. Nonetheless, I want to evade questions concerning this issue and wish to refer the reader to what has already been said about it in Chapter Two. Instead, I want to focus on the question whether reason can be a feature of thinking individuals 'lower' than the human mind, even though there might be room for interesting research concerning the aforementioned issue in the future.

I do think that Spinoza saw reason as a feature manifest solely in the human mind (with regard to the lower organisms); there are clear indications in the *Ethics* that he thought so, these indications will be enumerated in the next section. However, it is not clear from the propositions in which Spinoza addresses the common notions as the foundations of reason, that reason is a uniquely human affair. Without really venturing into the thickets of the demonstrations of propositions 38 and

⁸⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics* 3p9.

39, I will say something about a key aspect of these demonstrations that in effect contradicts a selective reading of these propositions; i.e. a reading that would attribute reason solely to human minds on the merit of the demonstrations of 2p38 and 2p39.⁸⁸

I think we can be fairly brief about why such a reading would not be successful. The adequateness of an idea in the mind representing something which is common to all things (in 2p38 and 39), is not explained through a particular power of the mind, it appears, but from the fact that the object of the idea is something which is equally in the part and in the whole of everything. Although Spinoza explicitly refers to the human mind and to the affections of the human body in both propositions, there is no apparent reason why the demonstration would not be applicable to other thinking individuals as well; this is even strengthened by Spinoza's reference to proposition 13 in 2p38. In the scholium to proposition 13 Spinoza posits that what he has said concerning the human mind, counts for other thinking individuals as well.⁸⁹ In light of 2p38 and 39 we could, for instance, conjecture that motion and rest are equally present in a horse (and in the affections of the horse's body) as they are in the human body and its affections. The human mind is able to form an adequate idea of the infinite mode from the fact that it pervades the whole of nature, but the same appears to apply to the horse. What would, in this context, prevent us from attributing reason to lower organisms? Not much, I daresay.

There is however a clue as to how reason might solely be a human feature. It is tucked away in the corollary of 2p39, and it reads: "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." This strongly reminds us of the claims made by Spinoza in 2p13s, with which we dealt in the previous chapter. There we saw that claims similar to the one in the corollary of 2p39 formed the basis for a theory that explained degrees of consciousness in terms of the relative complexity of an individual. It might well be that reason is also a matter of complexity and that for an individual to have reason a certain degree of complexity is required, a degree which by hypothesis could only be met by human modifications. But apart from this still sketchy thought, there is other clearer, albeit circumstantial, evidence in the *Ethics* that supports the hypothesis that reason is a prerogative of the human mind. This will be the main topic of the next section.

⁸⁸ Margaret Wilson, "Objects, Ideas, and "Minds": Comments on Spinoza's Theory of Mind," in *Ideas and Mechanism: essays on early modern philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 137-8.

⁸⁹ Although I have tried to show in Chapter Two that we should probably not call other thinking individuals minds, we should, because of the fact that they too are modes under the attribute of thought, nevertheless think of them as modifications that are highly similar to minds.

4.2 Reason as a unique feature of the human mind

In order to understand how reason can be regarded as a differentiating feature of the human mind, we will have to elucidate the relation between reason and the nature of human beings. We will see that the human mind's ability to reason and the concept of human nature are strongly connected. This will provide the basis for distinguishing between the human mind and other thinking individuals.

“There is no singular thing in Nature which is more useful to man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason”.⁹⁰ For in that case, Spinoza asserts, men agree entirely in nature. By the nature of a particular human being Spinoza understands the power of acting (which can either be increased or diminished) by which an individual strives to persevere in its being. So much is clear from the reference to 3p7 in the demonstration of 4p32. In this demonstration we also read that “[t]hings which are said to agree in nature are understood to agree in power”. The power of a human being, by 4Def8, is greater insofar as he or she is more successful in “bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the laws of his nature alone”. And, insofar as the human mind can be the adequate cause of certain ideas, it is said to reason. Thus, agreeing in power is agreeing in reason, is agreeing in nature. When man reasons, he is still primarily concerned with preserving his own being. That is, he will do only those things which are beneficial to his own existence and will avoid those things that will do him harm. The drive to persevere in existence is the natural drive that motivates every single thing conceivable under the attribute of thought or extension, but it is unique in every single individual. A reasoned self-concern, i.e. a rational drive, as can be found in man, will nonetheless be similar to that in other men who reason and because of that men will be beneficial to each other. This needs to be explained further.

The being of an individual is defined by its endeavor to successfully sustain or develop its present existence. Whenever an individual is acted on, this poses a possible threat to the existence of the individual. But whenever an individual acts, it necessarily sustains or increases its existence. For then it is the cause of something through its own essence, i.e. through its own drive to persevere in its existence. An individual's power is measured by its ability to act. Furthermore, anything that will increase an individual's power of acting is good. Living life by the dictates of reason is good for an individual, for adequate ideas are by definition an expression of an individual's power. Things are either harmful, good or indifferent for the striving to persevere in existence. The essence of a man who reasons will be defined by power, for most of his desires will be adequate (ideas). When affected by another man who reasons, this other human being will be either good, bad or indifferent to his existence. However, a man who reasons cannot be evil or indifferent to the essence of another

⁹⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics* 4p35c1.

reasoning man, for the essences of the two men who reason agree with each other, because they are both defined by power. If the essence of the one would be harmful or indifferent to the other, then their own essences would be harmful to themselves, which is absurd.⁹¹

This explanation is still rather abstract, but I think we can clarify what Spinoza meant by the essences of the reasoning men agreeing in nature. I think that we have to understand this in terms of a synchronizing of desires or actions. Those who reason will, to a great extent, want the same thing, and will want this for each other as well.⁹² That is why they are necessarily beneficial to each other. Their desires are not motivated by external influences, but by adequate ideas. For example, there will be similar thoughts in those men who understand that everything is determined through God's necessity. Consequently, they will be less controlled by remorse. For remorse "is a sadness, accompanied by the idea of a past thing which has turned out worse than we had hoped". The knowledge that things turn out as they were determined, will be present in the mind of those who know God's necessity. These men will also desire that other men are less controlled by remorse and more by an adequate perception of the order of nature.

For if, for example, two individuals of entirely the same nature are joined to one another, they compose an individual twice as powerful as each one. To man, then, there is nothing more useful than man. Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than 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.⁹³

Contrary to agreeing in nature are they whose minds are controlled by inadequate ideas, i.e., by affects that are passions. Their minds are subjected to the fluctuation of outside influences, and they are rarely, or never, said to agree with each other. The more technical explanation of this is that men who are controlled by passions can never agree in nature because of the fact that passions, being inadequate ideas, can never be fully explained through the nature of a single individual, but are to be explained through external causes which are as multifaceted as the differences in objects around us.⁹⁴ It is however also a commonsensical observation, on Spinoza's part, that insofar as men love the same object and want it for their own, or insofar as men hate each other, or when they are jealous of each other, they can hardly be said to agree in nature.

⁹¹ Spinoza, *Ethics* 4p31.

⁹² Spinoza, *Ethics* 4p37.

⁹³ Spinoza, *Ethics* 4p18s.

⁹⁴ Spinoza, *Ethics* 4p33.

I think that ultimately our ability as human beings to agree in nature with other human beings, rests on our ability to act, that is, on our capability to form adequate ideas (of reason) and that because of this, man is useful to man.⁹⁵ We will have to examine whether it is this ability of the human mind that sets man apart from the animals, so to speak, and why this is so.

In contrast with the numerous propositions which are concerned with man's dealings with man, there are but very few places in the *Ethics* where Spinoza has something to say on the relation between human individuals and (lower) animals.⁹⁶ But some of these places do shed light on the issue whether animals are capable of reasoning.

From this it follows that the affects of the animals which are called irrational (for after we know the origin of the mind, we cannot in any way doubt that the lower animals feel things) differ from men's affects as much as their nature differs from human nature. Both the horse and the man are driven by a lust to procreate; but the one is driven by an equine lust, the other by a human lust. So also the lusts and appetites of insects, fish, and birds must vary. Therefore, though each individual lives content with his own nature, by which he is constituted, and is glad of it, nevertheless that life with which each one is content, and that gladness, are nothing but the idea, or soul, of the individual. And so the gladness of the one differs in nature from the gladness of the other as much as the essence of the one differs from the essence of the other.⁹⁷

It would be rash to attach much weight to Spinoza's remark in this scholium that some animals are called *irrationalia*. It is not completely clear whether he is speaking for himself or whether he is referring to the opinion of the multitude; probably the latter. Nevertheless, the remarks about the differing natures of men and animals in 3p57s look interesting. However, the particular place of this scholium complicates an interpretation of it. The scholium is adjoined to 3p57 which proves that the affects of individuals differ as much as their essences differ. Essences in Spinoza's ontology are singular, so every essence differs from the essence of another simply because it is not the same essence. Consequently, everyone's affects will differ from the affects of another because they are another's affects. Necessarily, the affects of a horse will differ from that of any man and the affects of any man will differ from those of another human being. But it appears to me that (in 3p57s) Spinoza wishes to emphasize a more substantial difference between animal nature and human nature; something beyond the fact that all essences are singular. An equine lust and a human lust

⁹⁵ Also, when Spinoza says that men agree with each other in nature because they love the same thing, their agreeing is based on their mutual increase of power resulting from the affection of joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause. However, more often than not, this agreeing is annulled by a bad thing. For instance, in 2p34s, because of the hate between two men when their love is directed at the same thing.

⁹⁶ *Bruta* (e.g. *Ethics* 3p57s, 4p37s1).

⁹⁷ Spinoza, *Ethics* 3p57s.

differ from each other not only because the affects are the affects of different individuals, but, more importantly, they differ from each other because they are affects belonging to different natures, i.e. to a human or an equine nature.

I am working towards an interpretation of Spinoza's theory of mind wherein human nature differs from the nature of animals primarily in virtue of the human mind's ability to reason. I see passages such as 3p57s as strengthening this interpretation. However, it might be said that what Spinoza emphasizes in this scholium is that there is a difference in nature between every particular species, and not particularly between man and animal. Horses, for instance, differ in nature from individuals of other species, but agree with individuals of the same species, from the fact that their biological make up is of the sort that they behave like horses; and something similar holds for every species. Species differ because of a significant difference in both the physiological and mental structure. This, I admit, is of course what Spinoza says in 3p57s. But, notwithstanding this interpretation, I believe that Spinoza viewed reason to be a feature of the mind that belongs specifically to the nature of humans. I believe that in 3p57s Spinoza sheds light on the fact that although each individual is subject to the same laws of nature, there are difference between individuals that constitute something like a difference in species, or kind of individual. The mind's capability to reason will have to be viewed along these lines, as a feature of nature that is nonetheless not exemplified by numerous individuals, but by human individuals only.

The impression that there is a more substantial difference between humans and animals is reinforced by the first scholium of 2p37, in which Spinoza also refers back to 3p57s. Here he says, "[t]he rational principle of seeking our own advantage teaches us the necessity of joining with men, but not with the lower animals, or with things whose nature is different from human nature." To this he adds: "Not that I deny that the lower animals have sensations. But I do deny that we are therefore not permitted to consider our own advantage, use them at our pleasure, and treat them as is most convenient for us. For they do not agree in nature with us, and their affects are different in nature from human affects (see IIP57S)." Despite the fact that animals have sensations or feel things (*sentire*), that is, despite the fact that animals are thinking individuals endowed with (inadequate) ideas, we are not able to form any bond with the animals. In Caput XXVI in the Appendix to *Part Four*, we read: "Apart from men we know no singular thing in nature whose mind we can enjoy, and which we can join to ourselves in friendship, or some kind of association. And so whatever there is in nature apart from men, the principle of seeking our own advantage does not demand that we preserve it."

I conjecture that it is because animals are not able to form adequate ideas, i.e. reason, that Spinoza thought man incapable of enjoying the 'mind' of any animal.⁹⁸ We have seen that the

⁹⁸ We should not attach too much weight to the mentioning of 'mind' in 4AppXXVI; for this, see Chapter Two.

foundation on which men are said to agree in nature is their agreeing in power, which we can understand as their agreeing in acting. Acting is doing something which can be understood through the nature of the individual alone who is said to act, which, under the attribute of thought, can be nothing else than the formation of adequate ideas. Whenever Spinoza talks of forming bonds, or friendships, between men, we see him implicitly stressing the importance of reason. For instance, in 4AppXXII he says, that it is “especially useful to men to form associations, to bind themselves by those bonds most apt to make one people of them, and absolutely, to do those things which serve to strengthen friendships.” The formation of bonds that enforce the unity of men reminds us of 4p18s: those men who agree entirely in nature, i.e. in reason, come to form, as it were, one mind. Also in 4p71 Spinoza says: “Only free men are very useful to one another, are joined to one another by the greatest necessity of friendship”. Furthermore, in 4p35 and 4p37 (especially in 4p37s1) we see Spinoza stressing the importance of reason in the formation of bonds between men.

I think that these propositions concerning the bonds of friendship between men, together with our earlier findings, that the agreement of natures between men rests primarily on their ability to reason, and together with those places in the *Ethics* where Spinoza stresses the difference in nature between man and animal and their incapability to form any meaningful bonds, is quite convincing evidence that man sets himself apart from the lower animals through his ability to reason.

I believe that this conclusion is enforced by a collection of remarks, scattered throughout the *Ethics*, dealing especially with differences between (human) individuals that are led by reason and those who are not. In the first of these passages I think we can see Spinoza expressing the worry whether a human being who is completely devoid of adequate ideas, i.e. someone without the ability to reason, would still be human. In the other passages we can also see Spinoza stressing a connection between being human and having adequate ideas. The first remark is located in the scholium to 2p49. In reaction to the objection that a man who is without free will, will perish of thirst or hunger when placed in a state of equilibrium (like Buridan’s ass), Spinoza says: “I grant entirely that a man placed in such an equilibrium [...] will perish of hunger and thirst. If they ask me whether such a man should not be thought an ass, rather than a man, I say that I do not know—just as I also do not know how highly we should esteem one who hangs himself, or children, fools, and madmen, etc.” Spinoza admits that if someone is placed in this state of equilibrium and when there are no other causes internal or external that motivate the man except the two equally distant sources of nourishment, then the man will most assuredly die. But would this individual still be a man? This same question could be raised, according to Spinoza, in other cases. The examples that follow are telling: a suicide, children and madmen. These are all clearly examples of individuals who are completely determined by outside influences or of typically unreasonable individuals. Furthermore, in another place, Spinoza assures us that “there is no small difference between the gladness by which a drunk is led and the

gladness a Philosopher possesses".⁹⁹ The drunkard is a prime example of a man completely determined by external influences. "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."¹⁰⁰ Opposite to this man, is the philosopher, modeling himself after the exemplar of the free man, who is led only by the dictate of reason.

Finally, I want to mention Spinoza's take on the allegory of the first man in 4p68s. Here he says:

And so we are told that God prohibited a free man from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and that as soon as he ate of it, he immediately feared death, rather than desiring to live; and then, that, the man having found a wife who agreed completely with his nature, he knew that there could be nothing in nature more useful to him than she was; but that after he believed the lower animals to be like himself, he immediately began to imitate their affects (see IIP27) and to lose his freedom [...].

Although Spinoza professes it to be a (mere) story, the way he tells it is interesting in connection with the other passages from the *Ethics*. Adam is portrayed as being a free man, ignorant of evil (and therefore of its counterpart, good), determined through his own nature alone. He finds his equal in Eve; someone who is free, as he himself is. However, from the moment he begins to imitate the behavior of the animals, he loses his freedom. The part of Adam's mind consisting of adequate ideas, becomes smaller from the moment he starts to imitate the animals, i.e., he loses reason.

There is still one important question left unanswered and it concerns the metaphysical basis for the conclusions reached above: what is it that enables the human mind to reason, but is lacking in the lower organisms? I doubt whether we could ever fully answer this question, for it is not one with which Spinoza explicitly engages himself. However, we have seen the key mechanisms that enable the human mind to reason, i.e. the common notions. But we were not able to clearly make out from these why they would not also be operative in the minds of lower organisms. Then again, the question above might be slightly misguided. For the formation of adequate ideas is not a feature of the human mind alone. The formation of adequate ideas is essentially a feature of nature, conceived under the attribute of thought. A feature that is expressed through the human mind's ability to reason. The logical question following this observation would be: what constitutes adequacy in nature? The answer to this question should be a familiar one, namely that it depends on whether an effect can be understood through a certain cause alone. Thus, in God every idea is necessarily adequate, because everything is in God. And although it remains questionable whether the human

⁹⁹ Spinoza, *Ethics* 3p57s.

¹⁰⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics* 3p2s.

mind can ever legitimately be said to be the sole cause of any of its ideas, we can understand the human mind as at least approximating this ideal when it is said to have adequate ideas. I propose that we can understand it as (at least) approximating this ideal, because of the (possible) complexity of the human mind. It is this high complexity of the mind, relative to the lesser complexity of the 'minds' of lower organisms, that enables the human mind to reason. I believe that it is clear from Spinoza's language in many places in the *Ethics* that he thought of humans as highly complex individuals, far surpassing many other modes existing in nature. For instance in 2p13s he says, "to determine what is the difference between the human mind and the others, and how it surpasses them, it is necessary for us, as we have said, to know the nature of its object, i.e., of the human body." And in 3p2s, we read: "I add here the very structure of the human body, which, in the ingenuity of its construction, far surpasses anything made by human skill—not to mention that I have shown above, that infinitely many things follow from nature, under whatever attribute it may be considered."¹⁰¹ The structural complexity of the human body is mapped by an equally intricate complexity of ideas. In the previous chapter we already discussed Spinoza's holistic conception of the mind, and I think we have to view the mind's ability to reason in the same light. Because of the fact that the human mind consists of many ideas of a great variety, it is able to form adequate ideas of certain aspects of nature that are the same throughout nature. These aspect of nature are part of every thinking individual, but remain latent in many of them, only the human mind, supposedly, has the ability to make sense of them, because only the human mind has the mental power to do so. The human mind is able to embed the knowledge of the common aspects of nature into what is already a coherent set of knowledge and I imagine that it is because of the human mind's excellence that it is able to process the common notions and form adequate ideas.

In the *Ethics* Spinoza confronts us with a metaphysical theory that might seem counterintuitive at first. But it turns out that we are able to reconcile it with some of our basic intuitions concerning the mental life of animals. For instance, with our tendency to think it probable that higher animals have their share of conscious thought. And with our disbelief that things like stones or trees should be considered as conscious entities in any meaningful way. Furthermore, we seem to be inclined to think of ourselves as rational beings and as such as somehow unique or superior (or at least as particularly highly developed) with regard to other animals existing in nature. In the four chapters comprising this thesis we have seen that we would be able to account for all

¹⁰¹ Other passages include *Ethics* 5p39s: "Because human Bodies are capable of a great many things, there is no doubt but what they can be of such a nature that they are related to Minds which have a great knowledge of themselves and of God, and of which the greatest, or chief, part is eternal." And also the Preface to *Part Four*: "But the main thing to note is that when I say that someone passes from a lesser to a greater perfection, and the opposite, I do not understand that he is changed from one essence, or form, to another. For example, a horse is destroyed as much if it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect."

these things through Spinoza's understanding of the human mind as the idea of the body. With this I do not in any way mean to say that a good metaphysics is a metaphysics that does justice to our common intuitions. However I cannot but see it as a merit of Spinoza's theory, and of the interpretation presented in this thesis, that it does precisely that.

Conclusion

At the end of this thesis I wish to review and rephrase some of the more important findings of this analysis of Spinoza's conception of the human mind, and highlight the conclusions that we have reached in the four chapters of this thesis. The human mind is a single idea in the intellect of God. This idea is composed of numerous other ideas that together constitute the human mind by means of the striving to preserve the unity that is the human mind. As such, the human mind is an individual, i.e., it is a mode of God whose single most important goal is preserving its present existence. The ideas constituting the mind are actively formed by the mind, they are affirmations. We have seen that we can illustrate this conception of ideas by saying that they are like beliefs. Because of the strict parallelism of the attributes of thought and extension, and because of Spinoza's mode-identity theory, i.e., the theory that the idea parallel to a physical mode is identical to its counterpart in extension, we have to conclude that for every physical individual under the attribute of extension there is a thinking individual under the attribute of thought. The human mind, as the idea of the human body, is only one of the infinitely many ideas corresponding to infinitely many bodies in nature; it is (only) one type of individual among many others.

Spinoza held the firm belief that everything in nature acts according to the same laws. In effect, we can conjecture that the formation of other individuals in nature will be similar to the formation and preservation of the human mind. That is to say, as physical things, these other individuals, too, will strive to preserve a certain ratio of motion and rest, and as thinking things they, too, can be regarded as individuals that strive to preserve themselves as a unified cause. In this sense the human mind is no different from the rest of the individuals of thought. In this context, the question arose whether these other individuals could also be regarded as minds. We concluded that even though it would have seemed quite natural to do so, it is in fact not something that Spinoza does. In the *Ethics*, Spinoza quite consistently reserves the term 'mind' for the human modification. I think that this treatment of the human mode is motivated, in part, by a desire to have some clear way of singling out the human modification among the infinitely many modifications under the attribute of thought. But, apart from this aspiration, Spinoza's use of the term 'mind' also rests on crucial metaphysical considerations concerning the human mind. That is, Spinoza's use of 'mind' is also motivated by a consideration of features that pertain solely to the human mind, with respect to the lower organisms, but concord with God's infinite intellect.

We saw that consciousness could be regarded as an idiosyncratic feature of the human mind, but nevertheless not as a privileged feature by which it distinguishes itself from other individuals.

Other individuals under the attribute of thought also have their share of conscious ideas. Consciousness is, as we have seen, bound up with the structural complexity of the body of a certain individual, and thereby with the complexity of the corresponding idea. These considerations did indicate that consciousness is mainly a feature of the more complex modes, and that more complex modes are more conscious, and more adequately so, than less complex modifications. But, despite of the human mind's relatively high degree of conscious awareness, which is a sign of the human mind's complexity, consciousness is nevertheless not a distinguishing feature of the human mind with respect to other modes; that is not to say that consciousness could not be considered as a defining feature of the mental life of humans.

Reason, on the other hand, is a feature that is peculiar to the human mind, as well as that it is a defining feature of human nature. This is not to say that every human being is born with reason, but one could say that reason is an inborn power. Reasoning lies within the possible scope of abilities that the human mind is able to develop. The degree of complexity of which the human mind is capable warrants the human mind's ability to reason. The human mind's ability to reason is its power to have adequate ideas.

The human mind comprises many ideas that are inadequate, and it is most often the case that the largest part of the ideas that constitute the mind are inadequate. Ideas are inadequate in the human mind whenever the cause of the idea is not accurately comprehended by the human mind. This is the case whenever an idea is the result of another cause beside the human mind. Whenever the mind accurately comprehends the idea with its cause, thus when it is itself the cause of the idea, then the idea will be adequate in the mind. The ideas that the human mind has, or is able to form, of those aspects that are common to all modifications (the common notions), are adequate in the human mind. These common notions are the stepping stones of reason and the means by which the mind, through deduction, acquires more adequate ideas.

It became clear that reason is a feature peculiar to the human mind when we considered what Spinoza had to say concerning man's dealings with other thinking individuals (of a lower degree of excellence than the human mind). According to Spinoza, human beings are useful to one another because they are like one another, their natures are said to agree. We argued that, according to Spinoza, this possible similitude of the essences of human beings ultimately rests on their ability to reason. This is because of the fact that agreeing in nature is agreeing in power, and an individual's power is an expression of its ability to act, which, under the attribute of thought, is its ability to form adequate ideas. The ability to reason forms the ultimate ground for man's capability of forming bonds with other men. Viewed in this light, Spinoza repeated assertion that humans can form no bonds with animals because of their differences in nature, became an implicit expression of Spinoza's

belief that because of the lower animal's incapability of forming adequate ideas, the human mind can be said to significantly differ from other (lower) thinking individuals.

The mind's ability to reason is, as it was with consciousness, a reflection of the complexity of the human modification. But in the case of reason, this is a feature that pertained solely to the human mind. Spinoza's conception of the nature of thought is important in understanding the human mind's unique power to reason. We can see that, according to Spinoza's conception of the relative adequacy or inadequacy of ideas, the extent to which a particular item of knowledge is comprehended involves and depends on the comprehension of numerous other pieces of information. The way in which a particular item of knowledge is comprehended depends on the particular subject that is comprehending it. God, as the ultimate subject of knowledge, knows everything in a perfect way, because everything there is to know, is in God. The human mind, when it has adequate ideas, can be seen as striving to mimic this perfect way of knowing. Whenever the human mind has adequate ideas, it also knows something perfectly, and in that case, it also has all the resources available for understanding something truly within the confinements of its own space of thought, i.e., within its own mind. The human mind's potential complexity enables it to have enough thinking power for this divine feat, one could say. We see then, that knowing something adequately is knowing something in the way that God knows it, and that this is by no means a prerogative of humans; after all, God's idea is also a modification of thought. Therefore, we cannot and should not consider reason as a feature of the human mind alone, but ultimately as a feature of nature (considered as something typically thought-like), exemplified in the human mind. Consequently we are able to understand that Spinoza's appraisal of the human thinking individual as a mind, with its own 'privileged' features, is by no means a violation of his own naturalism, but a consequence of it.

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