

**Individuation and Individuality:
A Reading of Spinoza's Physical Interlude**

By

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Throughout this thesis the following standard abbreviations for Spinoza's writings have been used:

- E - *Ethics (Ethica)*
- Ep - Letters
- App - Appendix
- Ax - Axiom
- C - Corollary
- Def - Definition
- D - Demonstration
- Lem - Lemma
- P - Proposition
- Post - Postulate
- Pref - Preface
- S - Scholium
- KV - *Short Treatise on God, Man, and his Well-being (Korte Verhandeling)*
- TIE - *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect (Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione)*
- TP - *Political Treatise (Tractatus Politicus)*
- TTP - *Theological-Political Treatise (Tractatus Theologico-Politicus)*

Quotations are based on (but occasionally modified) translations by Edwin Curley (*E*, *KV*, *TIE*) and Samuel Shirley (*Ep*, *TP*, *TTP*).

All translations from French texts are mine.

Abstract:

This study looks at Spinoza's physical and metaphysical theory of individuation. It tackles the status of an individual in Spinoza's system given his remark in the political writings that the state is “guided as if by one mind.” Focusing primarily on the *Ethics*, the study begins with his physical account of the individual, and then proceeds to the status of individuals in terms of mind. Following this, it examines the question of the state-as-individual. Drawing from contemporary debates, the study focuses on three main accounts: the individualist, the communitarian, and the transindividual. This thesis argues that Spinoza's theory of individuation is neither libertarian nor strongly communitarian in the modern political tradition, which is to say that it neither favours the part nor the whole, but involves a constant flipping between both positions. The nature of Spinoza’s theory of individuation, then, is one that relies most fundamentally on relationality, reciprocity and mutuality.

Introduction

In chapter 3.2 of the *Political Treatise (TP)* Spinoza writes, “the right of the state of the sovereign is nothing more than the right of Nature itself and is determined by the power not of each individual but of a people which is guided as if by one mind.”¹

Spinoza uses both *veluti* and *tanquam* throughout the text; here he uses *veluti* for “as if.” This qualification has generated many controversies amongst Spinoza scholars. Is this use of “*veluti*” or “*tanquam*” to be understood metaphorically, literally, or as something more intricate? The controversy over how to read Spinoza’s qualification brings us to the heart of the central question of modernity: is the individual prior or *a posteriori* to the communal substance? Alternatively, has Spinoza found another way to think this either/or? Has he circumvented it, as he does with many other dualisms, by rethinking the distinction thought to exist between individuality and communal substance? I will demonstrate that we should read Spinoza's qualification as a rhetorical tool for working out his deeply complex metaphysical theory of individuation before I return to its implication for political and ethical thought.

Perhaps, at first glance, it seems that the seventeenth century Spinoza is not the philosopher one should turn to discuss politics. His project throughout the *Ethics* is to explain that God is nature, and further, that philosophic knowledge, and therefore happiness is to know and love this God that is nature. However, he began the *TP* by stating that he will:

¹ TP, 3.2.

demonstrate by sure and conclusive reasoning ... deducing them from human nature as it really is. And in order to enquire into matters relevant to this branch of knowledge in the same unfettered spirit as is habitually shown in mathematical studies, I have taken great care not to deride, bewail, or execrate human actions, but to understand them.²

What he sought, in his investigation of politics, was to understand the ways that human societies work in virtue of their passions, and not despite them. That human society is natural, and neither good nor bad informs his desire to offer, on the one hand, the distinction between knowledge of the Holy Scriptures as obedience and natural knowledge as the free contemplation of God in the *Theological-Political Treatise (TTP)*. On the other hand, he outlines what he takes to be the most optimal ways to govern in the *TP*. I take that his political project, as an extension of the *Ethics*, is to find the best ways to govern people and allow them the highest likelihood of following natural knowledge. In fact, these two aims often run hand in hand.

In the *TTP* and *TP* Spinoza is perhaps the first author in modernity to argue for democratic forms of political authority. In the *TTP*, he rewrites Hobbes' notion of the social contract to argue that individuals make a compact for the sake of their security. In the *TP*, Spinoza makes no mention of this contract, and many readers have been left to believe that he thinks that there is no abstract state of nature, but always a *societas* (association, or participation) in force prior to the making and unmaking of given states. These writings give rise to very diverse readings of Spinoza's politics.

I will cover two areas in the latter half of this thesis, the individualist and the collectivist version. What is at play, fundamentally, between these two readings is how different interpretations find, or do not find, Spinoza to fit the liberal tradition. The

² *TP* 1,4.

individualist, which is to say liberal or libertarian, readings of Spinoza are those who read the *veluti menti* distinction as metaphor. I make no claim to be covering all theorists who fall into this camp, nor all the implications that follow for Spinoza's philosophy, but focus primarily on the works of Steven Barbone and Lee Rice on the question of the *veluti menti* distinction.³ Barbone and Rice find that the individual is prior to the state, and further, that the state does not possess the metaphysical fundamentals to be an individual. If it did, the worry is that the rights of the state-as-individual would eclipse those of individual humans. The individualists, or as I later refer to them, the metaphorists, point to the *TTP* to argue that while individuals participate in the state, they possess a power (*potentia*) or natural right that does not submit or integrate to the state.⁴ Secondly, they point to the distinction between a singular thing and an individual. E2def7 tells us that a singular thing (*res singulares*) is the "cause of one effect."⁵ And further, by E3p4: "no thing can be destroyed except by external cause," and in the *TP* 6/6, "a commonwealth is always in greater danger from its citizens than from its enemies."⁶ Through these key parts of Spinoza's texts they argue that the state must be a singular thing and not an individual since citizens that are internal to it can destroy it whereas a true individual cannot.

The collectivists, who include Marxists and Anarchist readings of Spinoza, read

³ Isaiah Berlin (1969), for instance, condemned Spinoza because he took Spinoza to be putting the interests of the state above individual interests. This would cause problems for any liberal politics that would want to claim Spinoza as one of their fore fathers.

⁴ *TTP* 17.

⁵ E2def7. Here I will point out that, for Spinoza, a singular thing is, as mentioned above, that which has one cause. Particular things are, by E1p25col, "definite and determinate" modes in any attribute. Bodies, by E2p11def, are extended things. An individual, by E2p13def, is that which is united in one "unvarying relation" of motion and rest.

⁶ E3p4, *TP* 6.6.

the qualification differently. Alexandre Matheron's *Individu et Communauté chez Spinoza* is the most influential texts in this camp and has influenced many interpretations since then. Matheron argues that, by extension of E2p13def, the definition of an individual, we should think of political states as individuals. Matheron argues that individuals in the political state, just as simple bodies within a composite body (i.e. blood in the human body), retain their individuality despite being part of the state, thus satisfying the remarks in the *TTP*.⁷ Think, for example, of one's own citizenship. I may be a citizen of Canada, and while the state may be its own individual, of which I am a part, I do not lose my individuality for being a part of that whole. An *imperium* as collective is always able to enact the power of both itself and of the state if moved from fear and so on. It is not entirely clear, on the literalist account, how the mind of the state functions, or what exactly it is, but Balibar offers an account, which I will take up, that it is a *quasi-mind*.⁸ This mind, then, is something of a mind-like assemblage.

Though I do not cover this political reading in depth of Spinoza below, it is important to note his impact on both feminist and ecological studies. Given the lack of absolute distinction between human and animals, some scholars believe Spinoza evinces an ecological thinking. His rigorous naturalist philosophy grants no special place to humanity and subjects all objects and beings to the same natural laws, and this has

⁷ This implies that the true anti-individualist readings are the idealist readings (including British Hegelianism and Neo-realism) of Spinoza that suggest human individuality is *only* an illusion. See, for example, Harold Henry Joachim (1901).

⁸ Though I do not deal with this issue here, Jonathan Bennett (1984), notes that a state should be able to kill its citizens, just as the citizens should be able to dispose a state. This is because Spinoza does allow for the possibility of suicide at E4p20s in spite of the *conatus* doctrine. If a human individual can kill herself, then the constituents of a state should also be able to revolt and dispose of a state.

appealed to ecosophers.⁹ On the other hand, feminist interpretations have also celebrated elements of Spinoza's thought. Against those forms of feminism that derive, through long interrogations and critique *via* Hegelian negativity, feminists such as Moira Gatens, Genevieve Lloyd and Hasana Sharp, argue that Spinoza's disavowal of certain dichotomies, such as mind/body, reason/emotion, freedom/necessity, leads to a thinking of activity that allows for a robust philosophy of becoming that is not based in any form of essentialism.¹⁰

I will begin with an investigation of Spinoza's metaphysical theory of individuation, drawing on what is commonly called in the literature the "physical interlude."¹¹ This "interlude" includes propositions 13 and 14 of the second book of the *Ethics*, "Of the Nature of the Origin of the Mind," which focuses on the mind, the intellect, and ideas. These two propositions break the general theme of the second book by explaining the notion of the individual, or bodies, in terms of extension, rather than in terms of the mind. Spinoza's system claims to have many attributes, but the only two that are available to humans are mind and body. These are the two aspects of substance we can consider individuality through. These two propositions, then, shed considerable light on what Spinoza considers physical individuality. Despite focusing on the ontological status of bodies in his theory of individuation, Spinoza's theory is clearly not a reductive materialism. Spinoza's parallelism of the attributes of mind and body tells us that thought

⁹ For an introduction to this view, see Arne Naess (1973, 1980).

¹⁰ For an introduction to this view, see especially Gatens's collected volume on feminist interpretations of Spinoza (2009).

¹¹ At E2p13, Spinoza explains the mind/body union: "Nobody can really understand this union adequately, or distinctly, unless he first understands the nature of our body" (E2p13s) – therefore, we may say that understanding the physical will aid us in understanding the ideal. Anglo-American scholarship tends to read him as a physicalist, see Bennett (1984), and Gabbey (1996), whereas European scholars often read him as a non-physicalist, see Gueroult (1974) and Moreau (1994).

and extension are different expressions of the same substance, as evidenced by his remark at E2P7 where he states that the “order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”¹² As such, we must be wary in our reading of physical individuality to avoid a theory of individuation that is exclusive to physical bodies. After all, if the people act as if by one mind, they also act as if by one body. The definition of an attribute – “what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence” – read in conjunction with Spinoza's substance monism points us towards a theory of mode-identity and individuation. Put differently, only the modes are that which are individuated in Spinoza's metaphysics. Understanding this fact will help us to understand the importance of thinking individuation at the physical as well as at the level of the mind.¹³

In chapter one, I give a brief overview of the foundations of Spinoza's substance ontology. In highlighting some differences between Spinoza and Descartes' metaphysics, I set the stage to discuss the position of individuation and the individual in Spinoza's system. As such, I begin with substance, the foundation of Spinoza's system, which is absolutely infinite and unitary.¹⁴ Following the geometrical method of the *Ethics*, which contains definitions that set the central terms of Spinoza's project, I proceed from the conception of substance to its attributes and modes. As my project here is not an analysis of the opening moves of the *Ethics*, I confine this chapter to a basic introduction to Spinoza's ontology.

¹² E2p7.

¹³ Idef4.

¹⁴ There is debate in the literature whether we can say that Spinoza held God to be immutable. Pointing to E1p20c2 - “God, or all of God's attributes, are immutable” seems to say it all. Pierre Bayle (1991), in his entry on Spinoza, maintained, “the God of the Spinozists is a nature actually changing.” Jonathan Bennett (1984), Edwin Curley (1969, 1991), and Yitzak Melamed (2013) have all endorsed something similar, and therefore accept that Spinoza's God is, in fact, mutable.

Chapter two examines the “physical interlude” in great detail. Looking both to the *Ethics* as well as contemporary secondary sources, I turn to the account of physical individuality. In doing so, I go through the three kinds of bodies that Spinoza introduces, the simple bodies, composite bodies, and composite bodies with composite parts. Further, I outline what bodies are in terms of motion and rest, fixed ratios, and the *conatus*, the latter of which is the “striving” that is the heart of every existing thing. What is at stake is a correct understanding of motion and rest, which I claim is best understood as two sides of two expressions of extension. Further, I argue that we cannot understand fixed ratios as strict mathematical ratios, but rather as the fluctuation and perseverance of said expressions of extension. Finally, the *conatus* provides a fundamental key to understanding this perseverance, from simple to complex, of the proper fixed ratio of the two expressions of extension. In doing so, I argue that there is an important distinction between individuation and individuality, which I detail in general terms in chapter three.¹⁵ I argue that we maintain our individuality even as we are part of the whole, and moreover, that we cannot lose this individuality by some dissolution into the whole. However, from the point of view of adequate ideas, we can recognize that our individuation both is and is not. While we always retain our self-identity, we are also always part of greater wholes, all the way to the totality of substance.

¹⁵ Though I return to this distinction in chapter three, here I will say that individuality is that which any particular thing has if it has a *conatus*. There is a desire to preserve within that identity, we could say. Individuation, on the other hand, is that which marks us apart from other singular things. The most adequate our reasoning is, which is to say the closer we come to the third kind of knowledge, the more we realize that being individuated one from the other is a limited way of understanding reality from the point of view of the finite, or Duration, instead of through infinite Substance, or Eternity. For example, that I see myself as separate from my neighbor in the sense that I think I am autonomous and self-directing is incorrect insofar as we both participate in Substance, at both the physical and ideational level.

In chapter three, I further the arguments from chapter two by discussing the implications of the physical account in the “physical interlude” for the attribute of thought. It is my contention that, in a similar fashion, ideas are individuated, just as bodies are. To make this clear, I start with a consideration of what Spinoza means by the inadequate and adequate ideas. Inadequate ideas are the result of sense-based forms of cognition, and while Spinoza does not denigrate sense-based knowledge, as it is important for many of our faculties, he nevertheless maintains it is the source of all error. Adequate knowledge, on the other hand, relies on our inter-subjectivity by which we can guarantee that the ideas that we share represent something in nature, and thus underlies the so-called “common notions.”¹⁶ In paying attention to the distinction between inadequate and adequate ideas, I argue that we can demonstrate the key difference in the way we should approach individuation and individuality in Spinoza's system. Pointing out this difference depends on a robust understanding of the *conatus*. The ability of a thing to maintain its individuality in the face of the decreasing individuation of adequate knowledge is precisely dependent upon that individual's *conatus*.

Following these discussions, I extend my focus from the metaphysical to the political in chapter four. In doing so, I examine the implications of Spinoza's theory of individuation in light of his remarks in the *TP*. In light of the metaphysical background of Spinoza's theory of individuation, I search for answers to the above questions. To do so, I turn to three areas of contemporary scholarship on this qualification, staying close to

¹⁶ It is worth noting that we can all have commonality in our ideas with those ideas that are clear and distinct. For example, we can all possess the idea of a triangle in our heads; disagreement arises when we try to “translate” that idea outward to one another. Say, for instance, that I draw a triangle that, despite my best attempt to translate it from my idea, looks more like a square. Presumably, my peers would disagree with what I have given to be a triangle because it does not match the adequate idea of a triangle in their minds, which we do share, despite my poor attempt at drawing it.

Spinoza's texts in order to parse out different interpretations.

Chapter five focuses on the individualist, collectivist, and transindividual readings of the qualification in the *TP*. The writings of Steven Barbone and Lee Rice read Spinoza's *veluti* qualification as metaphorical, insisting that Spinoza intends his readers to understand that the state only *appears* to act as if an individual, when, in fact, it does not possess a *conatus* or a unified body. The collectivist tradition, which includes such figures as Alexandre Matheron and Pierre-Francois Moreau, advocates a literal reading of the qualification. The people, or the multitude, have one soul. The notion of an ensouled multitude is cashed out in terms of the *conatus* of the state, or in terms of the collective passions and ideas of a people. It is my contention that both readings overlook the fundamental inter-connection of individuals. As such, I turn to Etienne Balibar's transindividualist account. Drawing from Gilbert Simondon, Balibar argues that individuation, both in metaphysical and political terms, is "always already" in progress and applies equally to bodies as to souls, ideas and political movements.¹⁷ Moreover, all social action is always one of both interaction and circumstance, which is to say that an individual is comprised of herself, her relations with others, and the exact milieu in which she finds herself. Ultimately, I argue that, for Spinoza, the state is neither not an individual, nor is it one. I endorse a Balibarian notion of a *quasi*-individual state that is transindividual. At the end of this chapter, I argue for the importance of studying Spinoza's politics to tackle some of the most pressing political concerns today, for instances, issues of exclusion and representation and normative political platforms versus

¹⁷ For Simondon's account of the transindividual, which he denies is Spinozistic despite Balibar's claims, see Gilbert (1958, 1964, and 1989).

utopic thinking. My thesis is that our current political vocabulary does not allow us to understand Spinoza — even 400 years later since we are still stuck in this dualism of self and community, and Balibar's account provides one vision of what Spinoza could have envisioned outside of that dualism.

Chapter I

Substance

Spinoza begins, most famously, from substance – *Deus Sive Natura* – which expresses the two known attributes of extension and thought. Spinoza does certainly not introduce the conception of substance. The philosophical study of substance has a long and rich history from Ancient Greek thinkers, such as Aristotle to medieval scholars, such as Aquinas, to Spinoza's near contemporary, Descartes. In fact, it is the case that a great deal of Spinoza's own formulation of his conception of substance is in response to what he found to be problematic in Descartes' conception.

While Spinoza is meticulous regarding definitions in the *Ethics*, we can easily see that he takes up a lot of traditional terminologies, both from Descartes and the scholastics, only to redefine and rework it. There are many places throughout his corpus where he seems to be arguing in one way, but is, in fact, arguing in another. In my current investigation, this is of particular importance. Spinoza is, in fact, notorious for using traditional terms in completely different ways and thus is often misread for this reason. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to unpack some of his metaphysical terminologies before we can begin to tackle how this will affect his political writings.

In this chapter, I give a brief synopsis of Cartesian substance ontology in an effort to contextualize Spinoza's point of departure. Following this brief look at Descartes, I give a global exegesis of Spinoza's metaphysical system, focusing on substance, attributes, and modes. Here, the intention is to be concise and, like Spinoza himself declares, to set the stage to “consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a

question of lines, planes, and bodies.”¹⁸ While my overarching questions are less about human capriciousness, or the geometrical method, than they are with investigating the individual *vis-à-vis* the whole.

1.1 Substance

Modeled on the classical presentation of geometry derived from Euclid's *Elements*, written circa 300 B.C.E, Spinoza wrote his *Ethics* in a deductive geometrical style and, as such, it is not what one would call inviting. This form of presentation is a synthetic style that proceeds from causes to effects and also draws from Aristotelian science.¹⁹ As opposed to induction, which begins with effects and moves towards their causes, his deductive style allows him to begin with 1) the thing, God (cause), that explains other things and, then proceed to 2) the things that are being explained (effect).²⁰ It is God that comes first in the casual order of things; man and other entities follow from and depend on God. While utilizing the geometrical method in the seventeenth century was not uncommon, Spinoza himself called it “cumbersome,” and it has been suggested that he paused to write the *Political-Theological Treatise* during the time he was writing the *Ethics*, in part, to demonstrate his work in a more accessible format.²¹

In one of his earliest works, *The Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza notes that “the most perfect Method will be the one that shows how the mind is to be directed according to the standard of the given idea of the most perfect Being,” and further that to

¹⁸ E3Pref.

¹⁹ The Aristotelian notion that true knowledge, or science, is knowledge of causes. For instance, see, *Posterior Analytics* 71 b 9-11, 94 a 20, *Physics* II/3 and *Metaphysics* V/2.

²⁰ R.S. Woolhouse, *Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 30-31.

²¹ 4p18s. Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998), chapter 1. See also Israel (2001).

understand this Being, or Nature, our mind must

reproduce completely the likeness of Nature; it must bring all of its ideas forth from that idea which represents the source and origin of the whole of Nature, so that the idea is also the source of the other ideas.²²

What the *Ethics* tells us is that the primary Being, *Deus Sive Natura*, is the totality of the universe, and further, it is this being that causally determines all others. Spinoza's determinism is among the basic premises of his system, and it is also the structure of his argument in the *Ethics*; all depends on God, so all that follows from God. Every proposition, axiom, and demonstration reflects this dependence.

Both Descartes and Spinoza drew heavily on their scholastic predecessors, such as Aquinas. For the scholastics, substance is not identical with existence, and further, it possesses properties that are contingent and therefore not essential. Substances are that which exist not for, or by, another subject, and as such, there can be many substances, for example, humans, cows, and trees. Descartes largely dismissed this constituent ontology in favour of a substance that is an independent being that exists on its own without being a modification of any other being.²³ Unlike the scholastic tradition, Descartes argued that there are only two basic kinds of real substances, mind and body.²⁴ Substances, he thought, are self-subsisting things that have principle attributes that are not shared by each other (excepting duration). These two principles give us the two basic kinds of substance: the attribute of Mind is thought (*res cogitans*), and the attribute of Body is extension (*res extensa*).²⁵

²² Em, 38, Em, 42.

²³ *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Mediation 3.

²⁴ I say "basic" here because, strictly speaking, there is only one substance for Descartes as well, and that is God. See *Principles of Philosophy*, 1/51.

²⁵ *PP*, 1/51-53.

Moreover, these attributes are directly tied to the essence of the substances. Purely physical laws govern body, and further, it is always divisible. Extended nature is separable at any point, or points, along its extension. Mind, however, is never divisible.²⁶ For instance, the human body can lose limbs (up to a point), but the thinking mind cannot. The basic Cartesian ontology also includes modes, which are determined by their attributes. Despite the fact that modes depend on their attributes for a thing to *exist*, it must possess modifications.²⁷ For example, Descartes writes that there are many modes of thought such as “understanding, imagination, memory, [and] volition.”²⁸ For extension this includes numbers, universals, and “different shapes, lay-out of parts and movements of parts,” such as running.²⁹

For Spinoza, there is only one infinite substance, and it is self-caused, eternal, and primary, and this substance is called God, or Nature.³⁰ Not only is substance self-caused, but it is also “conceived through itself,” which places severe restrictions on interaction between things as causal necessity dictates all relations.³¹ Causal interaction, therefore, would be impossible between two substances that cannot share attributes or produce a change in each other.³² Because of this, substance is said to be both infinite and unitary. The question naturally arises, then, how do we explain what appears to be the interaction of Aristotelian-like substances that take place around us all the time? Spinoza's answer is relatively simple and breathtaking in its effects – finite things that interact are not

²⁶ *MFP*, Mediation 6.

²⁷ *PP* 1/56, 58, 64-65.

²⁸ *MFP*, Mediation 3-4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ E1def1-3, E1def6, E1p29s, E4pref.

³¹ E1def3, Ep1a3.

³² E1def3, p2, p14. See also the correspondence between Oldenburg and Spinoza, letters 2-4.

substances. They are modifications of God, which is to say the properties of God.³³ I will return, below, to the modes.

Spinoza maintains that reality flows from the essence of God in infinitely many ways; from God the rest of the universe emanates. The language of emanation is, of course, conceptual because it is always already taking place, and so any discussion of God should not mistake God for a reified thing over and against the modes or things it produces. Emanation here is not meant in a Neo-Platonic sense, but that Spinoza uses it here for an immanent understanding of substance, not in its usual transcendental meaning. All that takes place is part of a coherent whole, which is God or nature. In this way, we can make sense of Spinoza's remarks at Ep15, "everything that is, is in God," as well as his substance monism, which is anything but static: God or Nature is, simply put, the being of becoming. For Spinoza, being does not transcend becoming but is immanent to it.

However, God also expresses infinitely many attributes, each of which is also infinite and unlimited, as discussed below. Though human beings can access only two of these attributes, thought and extension, they are two aspects of the totality of nature. They are expressions of nature, which is itself both extended and available to thought. From the attributes follow the infinite immediate modes – infinite intellect and motion and rest – and the infinite immediate modes – truth and the total face of the universe.³⁴ Finally, the finite modes, or particular thoughts and actions, proceed from the immediate and mediate

³³ E1p5-8.

³⁴ E1p28, E2p13s, Letter 64 and 66. In these letters, Spinoza only provides an example of an infinite immediate mode in the attribute of extension. There is a large body of literature written on this topic, to enter the debate sees: Jonathan Bennett (1991), Edwin Curley and Gregory Walski (1999), Charles Huenemann (1999), and Yitzhak Melamed (2010).

modes. Every mode is determined to be as it is through divine essence. The world is as it must be; it could not have been otherwise.³⁵

What exactly are attributes and modes, and what do they do in Spinoza's system? They flow from God's essence and are causally determined, but how are they also expressions of difference within unity, that is, how does Spinoza avoid the Hegelian night in which all cows are black? Similar to Descartes' conception of the material world, Spinoza maintains that extension is modified by degrees of motions and rest (which I will return to in Chapter II). This modification produces the face of the universe and all of the particular, finite physical events or actions that are the modes of extension happening in time. Thought, which is modified by the infinite intellect, produces mind, which encompasses all of the particular, finite mental events, which is to say ideas. In other words, we should not be led to think of God in the same way as, say Aquinas does, as some reified "mind" or divine *mens*, but as being made up from the finite particular ideas (or properties), in the case of thought.

Ep2p7 tells us "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things," and, further, the causally independent attributes proceed in parallel. However, it would hinder our understanding here to think of them happening concurrently, for they are not really *parallel*, as habitually discussed, but are the *same thing*.³⁶ Substance, then, is its attributes. These attributes are its determinate essence, but the modes within a given attribute do not influence each other.³⁷ That said it is important

³⁵ E1p33.

³⁶ E2p7schol.

³⁷ Attributes also furnish us with a way of substance being an Eleatic "one," of which nothing can be said or known.

to bear in mind that for every object of the natural world that exists as a mode of the attribute of extension, there is a corresponding idea in the mind of God that exists as a mode of the attribute of thought.

While Spinoza rejects Cartesian dualism, he does endorse Descartes' rejection of atomism. For both philosophers, this rejection of atomism leads them to conclude that there is no ultimate particle. There is nothing that everything can be reduced to as we find in Epicurus or Lucretius.³⁸ Descartes endorses a corpuscularianism according to which God's ability to think of distinct material units as infinitely divisible makes that division possible.³⁹ While Spinoza's discussion in the "physical interlude" evokes the language of Epicurean atomism, one should not mistake his parallelism for the latter's positions. He accepted corpuscularianism on a material and scientific basis; however, all simple bodies are the *objects* of mind, rather than something *created* by the mind.

In part two of the *Ethics* Spinoza examines the human mind and its ideas. Importantly, he discusses this through explicit reference to the body. Ideas perfectly represent parts of the body, human or otherwise. E2p18 tells us that we are often ignorant of ideas, and, further, do not know their bodily correlate. While the many implications and problems of parallelism are a fascinating issue, it is only useful for us at this juncture to understand Spinoza's basic ontology. Here, as noted above, it is important only to understand that Spinoza's attributes run in parallel.

In this first chapter I have given a very basic outline of Spinoza's metaphysics in

³⁸ Interestingly, atomism is frequently attributed to the ancient Greeks, most notably in the works of Democritus, but there was evidence of atomist philosophies in both Indian and Islamic schools around the same time. It appears to be the case that the Islamic atomism is a hybrid of Greek and Indian. See McEvelley (2001), Gangopadhyaya (1981), and van Melsen (1952) for most historiographical detail.

³⁹ Pr. II, 20.

terms of substance, attributes, and modes. Once more, they have been delivered rather quickly to allow us smoother sailing through the sea of ideas of substance in which Spinoza found himself at the time. Undoubtedly, a project to give a fairer and more charitable reading to his metaphysics would require space not available to me here. My goal in this chapter has been to provide an account of Spinoza's basic system before I begin to unpack it in great detail. In providing this account, a few things have come to light that are important to bear in mind. Most fundamentally it has been shown that Spinoza's metaphysics is a monist one. For my purposes, this is important, as it demands further investigation of the part-whole distinction. What is the question of individuation but this distinction? The first step, as I see it, to begin to explore individuation is through the attributes. To that end, the next two chapters begin to explore Spinoza's theory of individuation first in terms of the physical, in chapter two, and then in terms of mind, in the third.

Chapter II

Individuation

In the previous chapter, I have demonstrated Spinoza's basic substance ontology in Part I of the *Ethics*. With this framework in mind, I turn to an analysis of his theory of individuation. It is my contention that both individuation and individuality are central concepts for understanding Spinoza's ethical and political thought. However, we cannot begin to examine his remarks on the nature of the individuality of the state in the Political Treatise properly until we have covered the physical and metaphysical elements of these concepts. I believe it is important to proceed from the physical account of individuation to understanding individuality as that which is dependent on adequate ideas. It is only after a thorough investigation of individuation and individuality that we can continue to the ethical and political implications of both. This chapter begins with Spinoza's physical account of individuation. Unfortunately, Spinoza did not leave a clear theory of individuation or individuality, nor did he use this differentiation explicitly. There are remarks scattered throughout his corpus that shed light on individuation and individuals, and I can turn to Part II of the *Ethics* for the foundation of his theory.

In this chapter, I focus on a close reading of proposition thirteen, and its scholia, axioms, definition, lemmas and postulates. My intention here is to articulate clearly Spinoza's definition of physical bodies and individuation. As such, I begin with axioms 1'- 2', lemmas 1-3, and axioms 1"-2", which are interested in simple bodies (*corpus simplicissima*). Following looking at the simple bodies, I turn to the definition, axiom 3", and lemmas 4-7, which concern composite bodies (*corporibus compositur*). Finally, I

turn to the scholium of lemma 7, and postulates 1-6, which concern the human body (*corpus humanum*), or composite bodies with composite parts (*individuum compositum*). After examining the “physical interlude,” I turn to sections outside the “physical interlude” to form a complete picture of individuation, with a focus on the doctrine of the *conatus*, before closing with a look at the general scope of the theory of individuation.

While Spinoza rejects Cartesian dualism in favour of a substance monism, however, unlike Descartes, Spinoza holds that this extended network of bodies has another expression in the attribute of thought (and presumably all other unknown attributes), without the two being separate. It is interesting that Spinoza chose, in light of this, to explain individuation in physical terms as there is a danger to read an over-reliance on the physical into his account of individuation. In choosing to follow Spinoza in demonstrating individuation *via* the attribute of extension, I presuppose a few things. The first is that we ought to understand the interlude as a trans-attributal explanation. By way of explaining this claim I presuppose, secondly, that what is at offer in the interlude is not a robust account of physics, nor was that Spinoza’s intent. Rather, the language of the attribute of extension is a linguistic placeholder for *any* attribute of substance. That this is the case will become significant as we shift from the language of extension in chapter two to that of mind in chapter three. Here, though, I will say that in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* Spinoza claims that we must do all we can “to reproduce the formal character of nature, both as to the whole and as to the parts.”⁴⁰ The aim is to possess an adequate idea of God, or Nature’s, essence and were this essence deducible from a merely physical account the issue would not be so grave. Bodies

⁴⁰ *TIE*, 91.

themselves share common properties with their causes within the attribute of extension, and this becomes a problem if we want to give an account of said bodies outside of the physical. When it bumps into a chair I know that my body, *via* my everyday participation in the physical world and my subsequent sense experience, causes the chair to move. That is to say I know it bodily. As such, finally, I presuppose that this provides me with part of the project of knowing, bodily, God's essence. It does not, however, provide me with any information about God's essence in any other attribute. Because of this, I suspect we ought to think of it as applicable to other attributes when reading the interlude.

2.1 Simple Bodies

Spinoza's demonstration for his physics is not *a priori*. As opposed to the deductive method of the first part of the *Ethics*, the opening moves of the "physical interlude" are empirical in nature. Put in simple terms, this echoes the example above: I know, from empirical experience what happens when my body bumps a chair. Throughout the interlude, the reader gets the sense that she is being presented with a different account of the nature of substance. Axiom 1' and 2' tell us, "all bodies either move or are at rest," and that they move at various speeds. Bodies are, as Spinoza notes in lemma 1, "distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance."⁴¹ This is to say, bodies are not discrete substances themselves, but rather they are modified extended nature. The action and existence of bodies are co-extensive in that they both exist and are active as part of their

⁴¹ E2p13lem1.

nature and adherence in their attribute.⁴² Further, there is no neutral state of materiality; everything is constantly in a union of motion and rest. In this union bodies determine *each other* to motion or rest; bodies are thus affected in a variety of different ways by a variety of different bodies, and are distinguished from each other only by these reasons.⁴³ That is, each body is in a web of relations and its specificity derives from where (as bodies are always in both space and time) in this web it falls. This much is clear from a basic understanding of Spinoza's ontology.

However, Spinoza is not always clear what he means by motion and rest (*motus et quietis*). Don Garrett notes that Spinoza most often treats motion and rest in a relatively ordinary way, that is to say, as two different characteristics of particular bodies or individuals, which consist in their respective change or retention of spatial relations.⁴⁴ In the *Short Treatise* Spinoza speaks of motion and rest as being possible without *particular* things, and, therefore, implies that these are two characteristics of the attribute of extension, rather than the qualities of modes.⁴⁵ If motion and rest distinguish bodies metaphysically, then how can they be characteristics of said bodies? This would seem to denote a world that is homogenous with no variety in time or space.⁴⁶ Looking at Spinoza's divergences with Cartesian views on substance helps to articulate a meaningful sense in which motion and rest function to differentiate individuals. Varying degrees of

⁴² E2p13lem2.

⁴³ E2p13lem3 ax1," ax2." Wolfson and Rice argue that this lemma is an exposition of Descartes' *PP* II, 37 and is a precursor to Newton's First Law of Motion. See Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*. (New York, Meridian. 1958), 68. See also Lee Rice "Spinoza on Individuation" *The Monist*. (1971), 645.

⁴⁴ Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation," *Individuation in Early Modern Philosophy*, eds. Kenneth F. Barber and Jorge J.E. Gracia (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 78.

⁴⁵ As quoted in Garrett, "Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation," 79.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 79.

motion and rest are distributed differentially throughout the attribute of extension, and, therefore, are the cause of differentiation in extension.⁴⁷

Within the attribute of extension, matter is mechanical, as it was for Descartes, but it is also constant and changing only as *quantities* of motion and rest themselves change, that is, they are measurable.⁴⁸ Lemmas 1 and 2, discussed above, demonstrate that different bodies consist in just these different ratios of motion and rest. They agree in attribute, as in they remain in extension, but differ in the quantitative ratios of motion and rest. Further, Spinoza writes, “a body which moves *or* is at rest must be determined to motion or rest by another body ... and so on, to infinity.”⁴⁹ As such, there is no neutral state; the quantitative difference in motion and rest involves constant internal change. Moreover, motion and rest is itself the basis of differentiation within extension, but this does not mean that there would be motion without bodies for the two must always go together. There can be extension without motion, but no individual bodies without motion. Every physical thing has, or is, different ratios of motion and rest and is always changing as these ratios change.

Simple bodies make up compound individuals, and as individuals they must maintain a fixed ratio of motion and rest to remain that individual. The body “of an individual ... is composed of a number of bodies,” and “furthermore, the individual so composed retains its nature, whether it, as a whole, moves or is at rest, or whether it

⁴⁷ Don Garrett, “Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” 80. This is Garrett’s idea of “differential distribution.”

⁴⁸ From a theological or vitalistic interpretation of Spinoza, equating the infinite immediate mode, which is to say the particular attribute of extension, with mechanism could be seen as problematic. Indeed, that Spinoza was a mechanist may be quite contentious, however it is becomes rather plain from his correspondence with Robert Boyle, via Oldenburg (most notably letter 6). This, however, is not the question I intend to answer here, but I take it that he is.

⁴⁹ E2p13lem3.

moves in this direction, or that, so long as each part retains its motion and communicates it, as before, to the other.”⁵⁰ Simple bodies may be seen as something of a subset, or an anti-atomistic building block, of individuation. While they are simple, they are more in line with a corpuscular material view of extension than an atomistic one. While corpuscularianism is similar to the theory of atomism in that it posits particles, atomism argues they are indivisible, but corpuscles can in principle be divided. Spinoza's simple bodies are, therefore, corpuscles.

Alexandre Matheron argues that simple bodies are pure events (*événements pur*) that take place in time and space, and are only defined by their external relationships.⁵¹ Their essence impels them to retain their motion, however, doing so necessitates that they change the motion of another simple body. On Matheron's interpretation, this entails their death because, since they are simple, this change in motion and rest fundamentally changes them.⁵² Remember that Spinoza does not tell his reader much about the nature of simple bodies, other than they are in motion and rest and can move at varying speeds. Matheron argues that simple bodies ought to be thought of as composite individuals composed of only one part, where a single part is its unique ratio, and there is evidence for his claim. Spinoza writes that there is “none more excellent than those which agree entirely with our 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.”⁵³ With this in mind, it makes sense that Matheron claims that if a simple body shares

⁵⁰ E2p13lem4, E2p13lem7.

⁵¹ This much is plain from Ep2p13a2”.

⁵² Alexandre Matheron *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1988), 27. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from Matheron are my own translation.

⁵³ Ep4p18s.

exactly the same motion and rest at the *same speed* with another simple body they will form another simple body together that is continuous and homogenous.⁵⁴ This to say that the simple bodies that deflect one another, or change each other's motion and rest do not agree entirely in nature, and are, therefore, separate individuals. Moreover, we can infer that simple bodies cannot change direction because to do so would change their speed, and, therefore, change them into another simple body.

I have demonstrated that the first three lemmas of the “physical interlude” show that the ratios of motion rest are quantitative, speed affects the body, and that causality is immanent in extension (that can be generalized to say that causality is immanent in each attribute), but what *is* a simple body? Simple bodies are the basic pieces of extended matter, “and the changing positions ... of these simple bodies might be constituted simply by the changing distributions of these homogenized in the force of motion-and-rest.”⁵⁵ The particular quantities of motion and rest in simple bodies can and do change through time and space *via* speed and size. Motion and rest, which are the two ways to understand extended substance (attribute), allow us to distinguish particular bodies (as modes) from one another. It can also be helpful to think of what simple bodies are *not*. It is tempting for the contemporary reader of Spinoza to equate simple bodies with something roughly akin to atoms. However, as mentioned above, Spinoza is not an atomist. Spinoza's Cartesian physics renders any talk of atoms inconsistent. In the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* Spinoza clearly states that there are no atoms and that the true nature of

⁵⁴ Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, 27.

⁵⁵ Garrett, “Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” 81. See also Jonathan Bennett (1984) and Valterri Viljanen (2007).

matter is that it is infinitely divisible, while atoms are by their very nature indivisible.⁵⁶

The simple bodies, therefore, cannot be absolutely simple in any atomistic sense. The nature of the simple individuals has to do with their much more limited ratio of motion and rest, their limited ability to speed up or slow down, and their ability to withstand change. If any other simple body changes another's ratio, it ceases to be. For every simple individual must be able to maintain its ratio of motion and rest, and its speed. Any changes to those, at the level of simple bodies, change it into a new individual.

Ultimately, I will argue that Spinoza is also politically anti-atomist as well, once we turn to the political writings in chapters four and five. I take it that this anti-atomism is derived from his metaphysical anti-atomism first articulated *via* simple bodies.

2.2 Composite Bodies with Simple Parts

Thus far, Spinoza's theory of individuation involves the understanding that there are simple bodies, which are individuals in their own right, and are only distinguished from one another through motion and rest and speed. These simple bodies can move at varying speeds, and further, can be different shapes and sizes, but, importantly, they are not atoms. How do these simple bodies, then, compose more complex individuals? If Matheron is correct, then simple bodies themselves already compose into other simple bodies, so we must ask how simple bodies joining together from the same nature eventually progress to a new level of individual. The composite body, this next level, is

⁵⁶ PP2p5. It is important to note that the *Principles* are not Spinoza's own philosophical opinions, however, there is a great deal of evidence throughout the letters, most notably in the exchanges between Spinoza and Boyle on the nitre experiments, that Spinoza followed Descartes in believing there was no vacuum.

the next subject in the “physical interlude.” Beginning with the definition, encompassing axiom 3" and lemmas 4-7, including their various demonstrations and scholia, a picture of the composite body with simple parts emerges. The first provisional definition of an individual occurs in the definition, in E2p13. This tells us that

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 (*corpus sive individuum*), which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.⁵⁷

If there are many bodies, regardless of size, that have contact through pressure, or move at the same or varying speeds, and share a certain pattern, then these smaller bodies compose one body. This body is itself distinguished from other bodies by its own ratio of motion and rest. It is crucial, if somewhat mystifying, that these composite bodies possess a certain fixed ratio of motion and rest. I return to this below. For now, let us continue to unpack Spinoza's account of the composite individual with simple parts.

Axiom 3" details the differences between hard, soft, and fluid bodies. Hard bodies “lie upon one another in a large surface,” soft bodies over a small surface and fluid bodies have parts that are continually in motion.⁵⁸ These, then, represent the three types of composite bodies that exist for Spinoza. Further, he makes it clear that composite bodies with composite parts can often be made up of all three types. Lemmas 4 through 7 state that an individual, of any type, can retain its nature if some of its parts are replaced, lost,

⁵⁷ Spinoza's use of the *sive* is important and perplexing. It is used to indicate the systematic identity or equivalence between two things, yet suggests a difference in terminology. It is clear that does not indicate a mere equivalence, nor it is a disjunctive. One way of reading *sive*, which seems plausible to me is that what follows the *sive* is meant to be a fuller account of the term that precedes it.

⁵⁸ E2p13ax3".

or accumulated. They may also retain their nature if they alter their motion so long as they keep the same ratio of motion and rest and communicate that ratio among their parts.

The scholium of lemma 7 notes,

We now understand that an individual can be affected in a great many other ways, and still preserve its nature because it is composed of different parts that can withstand change or can be replaced to the same effect.⁵⁹

Therefore, it is the relation of the parts to the whole in their constancy that creates the individual; this is how Spinoza deals with the mereology of parts and wholes. This is not to say that for Spinoza individuals are static and unchanging, in fact, it is the opposite. A complex individual's internal ratios of motion and rest change all the time as different bodies speed up or slow down, become hot or cold; the notion of identity is applied to a fixed ratio. Speaking of identity in this manner is appealing as it allows for a particular identity over time, but we need to address what a fixed ratio *is*. However, on this issue Spinoza is rather silent. As seen above, Spinoza does not give a precise explication of motion and rest in his system. Therefore, determining what the identity of a particular thing is becomes quite difficult.

Some commentators have suggested that the ratio of motion and rest be a mathematical ratio reflecting the measurements of motion and rest in both parts and whole that would make a thing's identity the mathematical sum of its ratios.⁶⁰ Matheron claims that the ratio reflects the total motion of an individual who is composed of many different motions of which only some are relevant to the total sum, or, put differently,

⁵⁹ E2p13lem7s.

⁶⁰ See David Lachterman (1997) and Martial Gueroult (1997), especially chapter 6.

only some of the part's ratios are subject to the total sum of a thing's individuality.⁶¹

Some have also argued that we must not define ratio itself as strictly mathematical. For instance, Samuel Shirley and R.H.M. Lewes explain Spinoza's conception of a certain fixed pattern of motion and rest as relation and H. White and A.H. Sterling translate it as a "kind of motion and rest."⁶² Jonathan Bennett describes it as a sort of coherence,⁶³ and Barbone describes it as a certain pattern.⁶⁴

However, Spinoza writes in the preface to the second part of the *Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-Being* that

If such a body has and preserves its proportion - say of 1 to 3 - the soul and the body will be like ours now are; they will, of course, be constantly subject to change, but not to such a great change that it goes beyond the limits of from 1 to 3 ... But if other bodies act on ours with such force that the proportion of motion (to rest) cannot remain 1 to 3, that is death, and a destruction of the soul... of a body⁶⁵

This text does seem to support the position that the ratio of motion and rest is a strictly mathematical one. This text points us to the conclusion that there is a specific mathematical ratio of bodies, and hence of ideas as well, that needs to remain constant at the risk of destruction or death. The example be taken to mean that the simple bodies that compose a more complex body must maintain a 1:3 ratio, and the whole body, or individual, must also hold a total ratio of 1:3. This section seems to provide relatively clear evidence that this mathematical ratio is indeed what Spinoza means when he says that the composite individuals have a fixed ratio.

However, Garrett has two objections to the claim that the ratio is a strictly

⁶¹ Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, 38-43.

⁶² Garrett, "Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation," 86.

⁶³ Jonathan Bennett, *Spinoza's Ethics*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), 232.

⁶⁴ Barbone, "What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza?" Ed. Olli Koistinen and J.I. Biro, *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 91.

⁶⁵ KV 2/pref 12-14.

mathematical one.⁶⁶ First, there is textual evidence in the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* as well as in lemma 7 and axiom 2' that counters the strict mathematical analysis. Spinoza states that when the body is determined to move by another body that first body's movement increases and its rest decreases, which changes its ratio.⁶⁷ Lemma 7, following from axiom 2', demonstrates that the body can “retain its nature ... so long as each part retains its motion,” such that the acceleration may take place so long as the ratio remains the same.⁶⁸ Garrett is right, I believe, to point out that this means we cannot say that the total ratio of that body will remain constant at 1:3 in this example, since the total acceleration will accompany a total decrease in rest, thereby changing the ratio.

Secondly, Spinoza's letters to Robert Boyle *via* Henry Oldenburg on nitre tell us, significantly, that Spinoza believed that heat *increases* motion.⁶⁹ It seems to be the case, Garrett argues, that individuals can “evidently survive even some quite considerable changes in temperature,”⁷⁰ even if heat changes their mathematical ratio (i.e. it increases motion and decreases rest). Think of boiling water: we may boil it above 99 degrees, and it becomes a gas. In strict mathematical language, we can say that it has changed its ratio, and, therefore, its existence is not continuous. In other words, the water's physical ratio *has* changed.

Matheron's position is similar to the one above. However, he reads Spinoza as attributing to the body both a material and formal element. The material element is the simple bodies, corpuscles, of which the composite is created, whereas the formal is “the

⁶⁶ Garrett, “Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” 83.

⁶⁷ PP2p22, 24-31.

⁶⁸ E2p13lem7.

⁶⁹ See Letters 6 and 13. See also Simon Duffy (2006).

⁷⁰ Garrett, “Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” 84.

structure that gives the composed individual his unity and his uniqueness.”⁷¹ The material is, then, an aggregate; the form is the individual's intrinsic principle or the essence, of the individual. This essence, called the *conatus* (which I return to below), is the opposition to other individuals who could have been formed from the same elements.⁷² Even simple bodies deflect others from their path in order to persevere in being, and the more complex the body is, the more it can withstand change and persevere over time. Matheron suggests that, in fact, we should only consider the “total quantity of movement and the total quantity of rest that affects an individual.”⁷³

This total is itself a mathematical ratio, but determined differently than it is in the straightforward account above. For Matheron, the sum total of the amount of mass and speed divided by the sum total of mass, whereby rest is identified with mass, gives us the total ratio of an individual that must remain constant to avoid damage, death or destruction.⁷⁴ It is tempting to characterize Matheron's point to be simply that in order to maintain a static global speed, the equation excludes some motions. It is perhaps more accurate to say that certain motions can be transferred to and from different simple bodies within the whole to keep the fixed ratio stable. Matheron uses an example of the brain cooling to facilitate the muscles heating up during physical exercise, and conversely how the brain heats up while the muscles cool during drunkenness.⁷⁵ For Matheron, this illustrates communication between parts, which is applicable both to the finite modes and to the total face of the universe. Moreover, he claims this reading of the “physical

⁷¹ Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, 39.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, 40.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

interlude” allows us to consider various different modes as individuals: “a Cartesian whirlpool, the solar system, the Earth, a cyclone, a rock, a biological organism [or] a political society.”⁷⁶

There are, however, some problems with Matheron’s account. The first is that it appears quite problematic to equate mass with rest. Garrett rightly comments that this does not take into account the requirement that the quantity of rest varies inversely with velocity.⁷⁷ Surely it is not the case that as the velocity increases that mass decreases, even if rest does. When a bird takes flight, it does not ordinarily shed mass, just rest.

Secondly, Garrett finds fault with Matheron's explication of local motion.⁷⁸ The worry is the same one as described above, namely that that the amount of acceleration and deceleration would have fatal consequences for complex individuals. For example, if I suddenly were to break into a sprint both the acceleration of motion and heat would result in my losing my nature and acquiring another, or my death. While there are surely instances where individuals die, or cease to be the individual that they were before, this criticism misunderstands Matheron's idea of communication between parts.

When discussing complicated individuals, like human beings, we intuitively grasp that part of our everyday processes, such as growing, ageing, eating, and producing waste, cause us to change, and, more importantly, that these changes do not result in a loss of identity or death. If we are to lose a limb or donate an organ, we continue as the same unique individual we were before the loss. Steven Barbone points out that this is a formula “reminiscent of Aristotelianism that the unvarying relation of motion and rest of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁷ Garrett, “Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” 84.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 84. Martin Lin (2005) also shares the same two objections.

the parts be considered as the form (*forma*) of the individual,” which is roughly equivalent to the formal in Matheron's account above.⁷⁹ As in Aristotle, losing or gaining parts, metabolic change, increasing or decreasing (growth and diminution) size, and movement from motion to rest and vice versa (locomotion) are all compatible with a changing individual that nonetheless remains itself through time. The ratio of the parts that an individual may lose either has the same ratio as the whole individual, or a different ratio from the whole. If the quantitative ratio of an individual changed it would obviously affect the totality of itself, and would, therefore, change the form of the individual. On the other hand, if these parts have the same ratio as the individual has, it seems to suggest that things lost are of the same nature as the individual.⁸⁰ For instance, Garrett notes that it seems absurd to say that a strand of my hair has the same ratio as does my whole body and that the loss of a single hair is a loss to the total entity. However, the preface to Part IV of the *Ethics* indicates that while something may change in small degrees, this change in itself does not change the essence of the individual. When an individual changes from a greater to a lesser, or lesser to greater, perfection only then does it change its essence, as “horse is destroyed as much as it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect.”⁸¹

Garrett's criticism is an epistemological one. He wonders how we are to *know* that an individual maintains a fixed ratio of motion and rest for its entire duration. The word *individuum* is not merely an arbitrary stipulation, so if we take Spinoza at his word, there

⁷⁹ Steven Barbone, “What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza?” 91. See also Barbone and Frederick Ablondi (1996).

⁸⁰ Garrett, “Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” 85.

⁸¹ E4pref.

must be a way to account for how he knows this fact about individuals.⁸² Garrett wonders by what argument we are to grant that such ratios *always* occur, and occur in the right proportion. That Spinoza does can only be sheer speculation. Spinoza's example of ratio of motion to rest in the parts of a horse as fundamentally different from the ratio of the quantity of motion to rest of the parts of a man or an insect does not offer a solid proof. Therefore, Garrett argues that solving this problem by speculating about the method of communication, and the regular occurrence of the right proportion, only exacerbates the second worry. Speculating seems to make an appeal to the idea of local motions of the parts using an epistemologically dubious path. After all, how are we to know that there is a communication, or motions, of the parts in the first place?

Garrett believes that he extricates Spinoza from both the mathematical and epistemological worries through understanding the notion of a fixed ratio in a less restrictive way. In reference to the epistemological problem, Jonathan Bennett suggests that the term fixed ratio be merely a "placeholder for a detailed analysis which [Spinoza] had not worked out, perhaps because it might involve a detailed anatomical and physiological theory of organisms which he knew was not yet available."⁸³ While the idea of a placeholder term does not fully answer the concerns above, Garrett does acknowledge and bracket what Spinoza could have known about the detailed functionings of individual beings.

Garrett imposes two conditions on the mathematical interpretation reading the concept of communication in the definition:

⁸² E3p57s.

⁸³ Bennett, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 232. Garrett, Spinoza's "Theory of Metaphysical Individuation," 86.

- 1) The parts that make up an individual cannot vary independently of one another.
- 2) The motion and rest of these parts must conform to an enduring pattern (even though all the parts and their motion and rest can change roles).

It is, of course, possible that an enduring pattern *could* be a mathematical formula, or that a mathematical formula could be one of many enduring patterns that exist. Letter 32 tells us “there is preserved in all together, that is, in the whole universe, the same ratio of motion to rest.”⁸⁴ Therefore, it must remain fixed, but it need not be understood as an unchanging mathematical ratio. In fact, Spinoza writes, “each thing... always perseveres in the same state as far as it can,” which echoes both Descartes' law of inertia and Newton's definition of inertial force, but does not dictate the structure of the pattern.⁸⁵ As such, Garrett argues that we should not take the remarks in the *Short Treatise* regarding a strict mathematical ratio as a serious hypothesis about the nature of complex bodies, “but simply as an arbitrary example of a pattern.”⁸⁶

While the second point can be, I think, granted to Garrett, it is not so clear that he is correct on the first. Matheron's explanation of the internal communication of the body, which is the transference of both motion and rest among simple bodies, is compelling. Spinoza's own internal epistemological inconsistencies aside, it is clear that Matheron's equation of mass with rest is wrong, but his account of the spread of local motion throughout an organism is correct. Moreover, it is intuitively more believable. Say I begin a sprint; my ratio of motion to rest will have remained fixed in an enduring pattern so

⁸⁴ As quoted in Garrett, “Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” 86.

⁸⁵ DD2p13. In footnote 39 of the DD, Curley notes that this may even be traced as far back as Lucretius, and, further, as it is articulated here we see an early version of the *conatusconatus* (E3p6).

⁸⁶ Garrett, “Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” 87.

long as I survive the exercise. I survive this because, as Matheron suggests, different parts of my bodies will possess different ratios to allow for acceleration and deceleration, along with changes in temperature. It is not the case, as Garrett characterizes it, that these local motions do not matter to the sum, but rather that we cannot take these local motions out of context. They do this together through communication, but ultimately each part is determined to motion or rest by other parts. What is clear is that the whole complex body does not change its ratio altogether, but through a hesitantly co-operative process.

In this section, I have demonstrated what a composite body with simple parts is, and argued for a plausible interpretation of Spinoza's conception of fixed ratios. Primarily through the work of Matheron and Garrett, I have argued that it is incorrect to assume mass is the same as rest, or that we ought to adopt Spinoza's claim in the *Short Treatise* regarding strict mathematical ratios. However, it is also problematic to reduce complex individuals to having an over-arching ratio that denies local communication in the simple bodies. As we continue to consider what the nature of the state-as-individual is in reference to the metaphysical treatment of individuals, we must pause to see what the implications are for the political. If, as I have suggested, we understand the individual as that which has a fixed ratio of motion and rest in the attribute of extension, it seems that that could carry over to a physical account of the individuality of the state as I have suggested in the introduction. Should we want to argue that the state is an individual, or at least a quasi-individual, it seems important to understand how it is to maintain such a ratio. Surely within a state, ratios of motion and rest change all the time, and as such it is the combination of local communications that must maintain this pattern.

2.3 Composite Bodies with Dissimilar Parts

In the previous section, I discussed both composite bodies with simple parts, as well as fixed ratios. Turning now to the final section of the “physical interlude” will allow us to explicate a more nuanced account of the composite individual with complex parts. Spinoza writes that we should “conceive a third kind of individual, composed of this second kind, we shall find that it can be affected in many other ways, without any change of its form.”⁸⁷ This higher order individual has a more constant relation among its parts and has, therefore, a higher immunity from dissolution or loss of identity. Immunity to loss operates, for Spinoza, all the way to “the whole of nature,” which is one individual whose parts vary in infinite ways, without any change to the whole individual.⁸⁸ Interestingly, the simpler individuals that make up these higher order individuals never lose their own individuality for being a part of another, greater, whole than themselves. Before turning to the postulates in the “physical interlude,” I will turn to a more concrete presentation of individuals with the famous example of the worm in the blood depicted in a letter from Spinoza to Oldenburg.

Spinoza's letter is an attempt to answer some of Oldenburg's concerns about the notion of individuation. What this letter demonstrates is that individuals cannot be discussed only in isolation from the whole. To be an individual is to be a centre of action connected in various ways with a network of other individuals.⁸⁹

“Each part of Nature accords with the whole and coheres with other parts,”

⁸⁷ E2p13s.

⁸⁸ See 2.6. It is best to understand Spinoza's references to the individuation of the totality of nature and the total face of the universe as infinite modes of substance rather than as substance itself.

⁸⁹ Lee Rice, “Spinoza on Individuation,” (*Monist*, Vol. LV, No.4. 1971), 652.

Spinoza writes.⁹⁰ The actual manner of this coherence is beyond knowledge, he says, but reason compels him to hold these beliefs.⁹¹ Parts are similar to one another or share the greatest possible agreement. It is in their nature, then, to adapt to one another, which is to say that they are determined to agreement, just as fish are determined to exist in water or puzzle pieces form a larger mosaic.⁹² That there is difference among things creates wholes of varying complexity, of which our mind also forms separate ideas. Coherence, then, is defined as the least possible opposition between parts.

To clarify, Spinoza illustrates with an example. Lymph and chyle have so adapted themselves to one another that together they form the fluid of blood. As such, they are merely parts of the blood, but in so far as they are different from one another, they are also themselves wholes (i.e. as lymph and chyle). Spinoza continues his example to include a small worm living in the blood possessing sight with which to discern the particles and reason to understand their interactions. This worm thinks and behaves as a human being in the universe does, and sees the particles around it solely as wholes, instead of also being parts of the blood. The worm does not understand the more general laws that the blood as a whole obeys; it is, for the worm, a state within a state (*imperium in imperio*).⁹³ Humans, like this worm, are often ignorant of the laws of nature and believe themselves subject solely to their own rational and normative laws. It can be very difficult for us to think ourselves, for instance, as parts of a greater whole as it undermines their sense of self-determination. However, since the entire universe remains

⁹⁰ Letter 32.

⁹¹ E4pref.

⁹² E4p18s.

⁹³ E3pref, TP2/6.

constant in its fixed ratios, and no change can come from outside the totality of substance; the parts are therefore “solely determined by the nature of the whole.”⁹⁴

This example tells us a great deal about individuals, the relationship of parts to the whole, as well as Spinoza's causal determinism. All particles of the same order determine each other, as, for example, lymph particles by lymph particles. Universal nature also determines these particles, say by the laws of gravity. Put differently, we can say that the causal determination of being hit by a billiard ball determines a second ball to change its motion, as well as being determined by the laws of physics that govern its motion after being hit and caused to move. This example demonstrates that particles are affected and are both passive and active forces, and further that individuals must be determined by both, whereby the laws of motion as active and the local determinisms of one particular ball hitting another are conceived of as passive. That this is the case must be true because finite modes themselves can never be an adequate cause among themselves, but neither can the laws of motion, or the infinite modes, be sole adequate cause. The local cause is passive because it follows from the active general laws.

2.4 The Human Individual

With the worm in the blood example in mind, we can return to the final postulates of the “physical interlude.” In the postulates Spinoza writes, “the human body is composed of many individuals of different natures, each of which is highly composite,” and later notes that humans are composed of individuals that are “fluid, some soft, and

⁹⁴ Rice, “Spinoza on Individuation,” 651.

other, finally, are hard.”⁹⁵ Moreover, the human body can be regenerated, and when it is, the process requires many other bodies. This is not meant to be a piece of science fiction, but rather, Spinoza means something much less fantastical, like healing a wound or growing out a bad haircut.⁹⁶ The human body, as a whole, can be affected in very many ways from the outside, and it can move and dispose of external bodies in numerous manners as well.⁹⁷ Bodies change from within, and in the case of the human body the composite parts that make up its form affect each other continually in a communicated fixed ratio. Similarly, humans affect other humans, other creatures, and eco-systems in just as many diverse ways.

2.5 *Conatus*

Here we turn to one of the most crucial terms in Spinoza’s writings. For Spinoza, the animating force that drives things to persevere in their being is called the *conatus*. It is the power and essence of a thing to “persist in itself,” but the nature and place of a thing also constrain how far it can go in that preservation.⁹⁸ Spinoza uses an example of a fish out of water; it cannot exceed its own nature by replacing its respiratory system so that it may breathe on land. The fish maintains fixed its own essential constraints at all times, just as much as a human does. In part three Spinoza writes, “no thing can be destroyed except through external cause,” and further states, “each thing, as far as it can by its own

⁹⁵ E2p13post1-2. Spinoza says explicitly that human beings are individuals, and further, he implies, at E3p57s, that animals are as well.

⁹⁶ E2p13post3-5.

⁹⁷ E2p13post6.

⁹⁸ E3p7-9.

power, strives to persevere in its being.”⁹⁹ Here it is not clear, in any meaningful sense, that the thing in question is an individual, but what *is* clear is that it is not equivalent to say that a thing cannot be passively destroyed and that it actively strives to persevere. However, what Spinoza does demonstrate is that we must not think of *conatus* as a replacement for a sort of teleology.¹⁰⁰ It makes no sense, for Spinoza's metaphysics, to say an individual does something for any larger reason than persevering. What we should say is that an individual *does not* do that which will hinder it. Our desire, or the force of our appetite, does not impel us to judge something good and seek it, but rather to seek it and then judge it as something good when it has not harmed us.¹⁰¹ That is, Spinoza's claim distances himself from any Aristotelian claim that living (*zên*) is for the sake of living well (*euzên*), which is to say for a good or *telos* beyond the individual itself. Spinoza's position is also anti-Kantian, since it denies the separability of nature, body, desire, and reason that is at the core of Kant's critical philosophy. There is a more complicated story to tell here, but for now we will leave it as is. The doctrine of the *conatus*, as articulated at E3p7, tells us that the striving of a thing is that thing's actual essence.

⁹⁹ E3p4, 6.

¹⁰⁰ There is debate in the literature as how far we can go when we say Spinoza is anti-teleological. It is uncontroversial that he denies divine providence, however, the case is not so clear if we adopt an Aristotelian notion of teleology that is independent of thought. Human, as is quite clear in Spinoza's writing are goal oriented. The goal is always continuing in our existence, so in that respect we can say that humans operate with a “sort of” teleology. There are many excellent papers on this subject in the literature, and I will not address the issue further here, other than to say what I mean above is simply that *conatus* should not be taken as evidence of any divine teleology. To enter the debates on Spinoza's teleology see Bennett (1984, 1990), Curley (1990), Garrett (1993, 1999), Michael Della Rocca (1993), Richard Manning (2002), and Martin Lin (2006). For my purposes, when I say that Spinoza denies teleology I meant that he denies divine causation, or final causes, and I bracket other debates.

¹⁰¹ E3p9s.

2.6 Conclusion: Scope of the Theory of Individuation

Above I have described Spinoza's theory of individuation. Looking primarily at the “physical interlude” at E2p13 what emerges is unclear. The problem of ratios and how exactly they are fixed ratios certainly requires more clarification than Spinoza gives. It is a question worth asking what exactly this theory applies to. Spinoza's immanent ontology demands that there be a way to distinguish parts from whole, for if there were no such method then we would have to concede that Spinoza's substance is nothing but pure, undifferentiated mass, a night in which all cows are black. For many reasons, this is not an appealing outcome for his system, not the least because it would render his theory of individuation moot. While it has not been my project here to defend Spinoza's system against charges that it cannot demonstrate such a part-whole distinction, I have taken for granted that it *does*. Now, we can ask a series of questions of this theory: is substance an individual? Can infinite modes be individuals? What of inorganic bodies, or simple bodies? Is there a meaningful difference between being individuated and being an individual? Moreover and importantly given Spinoza's parallelism, what can this theory tell us about minds and ideas?

Substance, Spinoza argues, has no external cause and “for that reason it is to be inferred absolutely that whatever is of such a nature that there can be many individuals (*individua*) ... must, to exist, have an external cause to exist.”¹⁰² Therefore, substance is not to be understood as an individual. It naturally occurs to the reader here that perhaps this proposition renders the differentiation of substance impossible, since it is that differentiation that allows for individuals. It is important to bear in mind that attributes

¹⁰² E1d1, d3, E2p8s2.

and modes are real aspects of substance and not subjective human phenomena or metaphorical tools. That the infinity of substance encompasses differentiations excludes the possibility of dividing Substance *realiter*, rather it is differentiated *modaliter* only.¹⁰³ By this distinction I mean that we cannot split Substance, we can only speak of differentiation in terms of the parts, or modes, of Substance. So, while we cannot speak of there being a cause of Substance itself, there is causation within Substance of the very real components. Neither is there a vacuum. There is no gap between modes; substance is not an aggregate, but an encompassed whole. Understanding reality, then, as only parts is merely a misunderstanding of the proper order of things and their cause. A whole must not be thought as a static entity, but as fully processual. The definition and lemma 4 of the “physical interlude” both imply that individuals are bodies, and moreover, the definition also states that individuals are a “union of bodies or parts.” However, in returning to part one, we see that substance cannot be divided, “for each part will have to be infinite [and] the parts would have nothing in common with the whole.”¹⁰⁴ Further that, when considered from the intellect, substance is “found to be infinite, unique, and indivisible” and, therefore, cannot be composed of parts.¹⁰⁵ That substance continues in its essence, and that there can only be one thing with that essence that exists necessarily and eternally, follows logically from Spinoza’s doctrine of substance monism.¹⁰⁶

As mentioned above, Spinoza states that the “total face of the universe” and “the whole of nature” are individuals.¹⁰⁷ What are we to make of this in conjunction with the

¹⁰³ E1p1proof.

¹⁰⁴ E1p12dem, E1p15s5.

¹⁰⁵ E1p12dem, E1p15s5.

¹⁰⁶ E1p8s, E1d8, E1p7, E1p14.

¹⁰⁷ E2p13lem7s, Letter 64.

claim, above, that substance is not an individual proper? Spinoza frequently conflates substance, nature, and God as *Deus sive Natura*, which seems to lead us to the belief that substance is, in fact, an individual. Here, Spinoza's distinction between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata* is a helpful one.¹⁰⁸ *Natura naturans* (nature naturing) is that which is in itself, and conceived through itself, which is to say that substance and attributes belong to *natura naturans*. *Natura naturata* (nature natured) is that which follows from the necessity of God. Subsequently, *Natura naturata* should be thought of as that which is modified and potentially an individual and depends on substance for existence, whereas substance remains unindividuated. In Letter 12, sometimes referred to as “The Letter on the Infinite,” Spinoza makes this same distinction in other terms. *Natura Naturans* is equated with Eternity, whereas we should equate *natura naturata* with Duration. Modes, in the realm of duration, are where parts exist, but in Eternity there are no parts, and as such no individuals. However, Spinoza remarks that the “total face of the universe is an example of infinite mediate mode of extension,” where motion and rest are the infinite immediate mode.¹⁰⁹

Here another complication arises. Garrett aptly points out that the “physical interlude” shows that bodies are singular things and that singular things are shown to be finite and determinate.¹¹⁰ What can we make of the above argument that finds that the argument that an infinite mode is an individual? Garrett suggests that either we read the

¹⁰⁸ E1p29s. See also KV 1/8&9.

¹⁰⁹ Letter 64. In this letter to Schuller, Spinoza also points to E2p13lem7s to explicate this difference.

¹¹⁰ E2def7. Barbone, “What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza?” 91. Barbone makes a similar point to a different effect. Here, Barbone is much more concerned with the translation of *sive* in the definition. He argues that it ought not to be translated as “or” but rather as “that” is to equate explicitly a connection between two terms or ideas that earlier was only implied. As such, bodies, which are individuals, become one body separated from other.

“whole of nature” as exempt from Spinoza's previous claims, or else “the definition must regard the phrase *corpus, sive individuum* to broaden slightly the sense of ‘body,’ so as to include at least one infinite mode.”¹¹¹ Garrett argues that we should understand Spinoza to be intimating the latter. The “whole of nature” is, while infinite, constructed solely of extended bodies; it is a composite body and is not, importantly, to be mistaken with substance itself. The finite bodies that compose nature might change, but the “total face of the universe” will maintain its fixed ratio. Moreover, no other infinite mode could be identified as an individual in the same manner without also being composed of the same parts. In the manner in which Spinoza describes the infinite mode no other individual fits this category. The nature of the infinite mode is, of course, a large debate in Spinoza scholarship. I have not intended to answer this question here, merely to highlight how it plays into the problem and gesture towards possible ways of understanding (or not understanding, as the case may be) the immediate and mediate modes.

On a smaller scale, it is still unclear whether this theory allows us to say that inorganic things, or the simple bodies (*corpuscles*) themselves, are individuals. It is my contention that inorganic, or non-living bodies are individuals for Spinoza, despite his not mentioning them as such explicitly. In the scholium of the “physical interlude” Spinoza writes that what is demonstrated is “completely general,” and further it does not “pertain more to man than to other individuals, all of which, though in different degrees, are nevertheless animate.”¹¹² Here one must understand “animate” as that which possesses a *conatus*, which, for Spinoza, all things do. As such, we should want to argue that simple

¹¹¹ Garrett, “Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” 88-89.

¹¹² E2p13s

bodies also possess a *conatus*.

According to the definition in the “physical interlude,” individuals are composite bodies with simple or complex parts. This definition seems to rule out seeing simple bodies as individuals themselves. Recall that for Spinoza there are no such things as atoms. Both Garrett and Matheron maintain that we ought to think of the simple bodies as individuals. Whereas Matheron finds simple individuals to be “pure events,” and, therefore, susceptible to death at absolutely any change in their ratio of motion to rest, Garrett finds them to be “internally homogeneous containing sub-regions which are also homogeneous, and able to withstand certain degrees of change.”¹¹³ It seems as if, on the one hand, bodies need to cross the threshold of simple to composite to be considered as existing things, and on the other that all things that possess a *conatus* are individuals. Though Spinoza never explicitly calls the simple bodies individuals, I am inclined to think that they are individuals in some sense. For Spinoza that term singular means something that has one effect, and though he refers to the simple bodies only as singular things Spinoza never gives the reader any indication that there is a set time frame for being an individual. Therefore, a simple body, though it only has one effect, strives to remain in being as all else does (i.e. has a *conatus*), and, therefore, ought to be thought an individual. That they should be thought of as individuals is the case even if they only last a nanosecond.

Above I have asked two further questions: is there a meaningful distinction

¹¹³ Garrett, “Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation,” 93-94. Barbone (2002) argues that there is no place in the Latin text that the simple bodies are referred to as *individuum*, or any root words, instead they are written of as *corpora, res*, or *res singularum*. However, beyond that he does not enter into the debate as to the nature of individuality in the simple bodies.

between individuation and individuality, and further, what can Spinoza's theory of individuation tell us about the individuation of ideas? These two questions will occupy the bulk of the third chapter. The larger question of this work demands that we have a clear position on the nature of individuals, both human and otherwise, before turning to Spinoza's key remarks in the *Political Treatise*.

In this chapter I have outlined the physical criteria of individuation of the simple bodies, complex bodies with simple parts, and complex bodies with complex parts. Further, I have investigated Spinoza's notion of motion and rest, fixed ratios, and the doctrine of the *conatus*. Finally, I have presented an overall scope of the theory of individuation highlighting certain problems, and some potential solutions. Recall that I want to answer the question: is the state an individual? Ultimately, I will not endorse a strict yes or no answer, but follow Balibar in thinking it is a transindividual. What I have demonstrated in this chapter, then, is that it is consistent to recognize the discrete individuality of simple bodies within complex ones, and complex ones within other more complex ones. All levels of individuals, then, can exist in simultaneous registers, though of course each level of individual will try to persevere in its being *via* the *conatus*. What I hope to have accomplished here is to have demonstrated an account of individuation that will position us to apply it to the above question. If an individual can be part of a greater individual, just as the worm in the blood is part of a larger organism, it should seem to indicate that citizens can be the parts of the state, and also that humans are individual parts in the whole of nature.

In the following chapter, I will demonstrate that there is a difference between individuality and individuation, which hinges precisely on the role of the ideas within this

theory. To make this difference clear, I will examine the distinction between inadequate and adequate ideas, as well as turn to the concept of common notions. This *individuation* is a confused and imagined notion of discrete selfhood. As we gain adequate knowledge, however, I maintain that we do not lose our *individuality*. Finally, I will discuss this all of this in terms of Spinoza's relational ontology.

Chapter III

Individuality

In chapter two, I examined the fundamentals of Spinoza's theory of individuation by looking at the “physical interlude” in part two of the *Ethics*. In doing so, I demonstrated that the “physical interlude” breaks down three types of bodies: simple bodies, composite bodies with simple parts, and composite bodies with complex parts. These categories allowed us to have an important discussion regarding the nature of motion and rest, ratios of motion and rest, and fixed ratios of motion and rest. Against Matheron, I have argued that we should not conflate rest with mass. I have argued that motion and rest should be best understood as two elements of the same thing. That is to say, motion and rest are the two ways of being available to the attribute of extension, as it exists in time. In fact, their being is dependent on maintaining their ratios. Every individual is always both of these things to different and varying degrees. I have taken fixed ratios to mean a specific pattern that simple and complex bodies have and must maintain to remain the same individual. If that pattern changes it destroys the individual or it becomes another individual. This notion of ratio does not mean, when we are talking about the complex individuals, that we have harmony without *difference*. Finally, I have argued that the worm in the blood example and the final postulates of the “physical interlude” demonstrate that composite individuals constantly interact with each other at varying levels and in myriad complex ways. The individual, then, is never a fully atomic one. Therefore, as has been demonstrated above, we may justifiably say that no individual, simple or complex, is ever an atom; politically, the upshot is that there is no atomistic individual as envisioned in liberal political theory.

In order to determine the complexity of Spinoza's ontological individuation, I will now consider further crucial elements of a Spinozist individual: adequate and inadequate ideas, common notions, and power. It is my aim in this chapter to investigate how the mental qualifications of individuality are demonstrable in tandem with the physical. In doing so, I will also return to a point from the previous chapter on the question of individuation and individuality. I argue that there is a meaningful difference between these two concepts for Spinoza, in that we always maintain our individuality, but as we approach the intellectual love of God, we see ourselves as parts in a whole and, in a manner of speaking, as participating in the totality of substance. Moreover, it is in the doctrine of the *conatus* that we find a bridge between them. Finally, at the end of this chapter I will briefly demonstrate how Spinoza's theory of individuation and individuality informs his ethical position, this *individuation* is a confused and imagined notion of discrete selfhood. As we gain adequate knowledge, however, I maintain that we do not lose our *individuality*. This positions us to move forward in chapters four and five to discuss the political implications of his theory.

3.1 *Inadequate Ideas*

Part II of the *Ethics*, excepting the “physical interlude,” is dedicated to an exploration of the mind. I have suggested above that perhaps it is the case that Spinoza resorts to physical explanations where he lacks the language to express the notion of individuality and individuation of ideas and minds. Above, I have called this a trans-attributal reading; meaning Spinoza uses the “physical interlude” as a model for how he will, by analogy, think individuation in the attribute of thought. The Cartesian physics that

Spinoza adopts, as well as his rationalism, set him up to dismiss the “occult qualities, intentional species, substantial forms, and a thousand other trifles” of a scholastic reading of natural philosophy and the nature of extension and thought.¹¹⁴ The human mind is capable of many things, and minds are so disposed as to be more capable the more complex they are, just as the body gains in power with great complexity. The mind, just as the body, can make errors and perceive inadequately. To begin to understand the notion of individuation and individuality in the attribute of thought, which I argue is instrumental to understanding the doctrine itself; we must understand the three kinds of knowledge in the *Ethics*.

Spinoza notes that there are four kinds of cognition, which give rise to three kinds of knowledge: 1) from singular things, 2) from signs, 3) from reason, and 4) from intuition.¹¹⁵ (1) and (2) are “opinion, or imagination,” which are prone to falsity, and generate inadequate ideas. Imagination is, for Spinoza, a bodily awareness. That it is so is not to dismiss his parallelism, but rather highlights the ways that we, when we try to understand *via* singular things and sign, do not have the correct idea in line with our bodies. Imagination and inadequate ideas are always incomplete. Reason (3) is based on conceptions of things “which are common to all, and which are equally in the part as in the whole” – the so-called “common notions.”¹¹⁶ Such conceptions are adequate, and reflect the formation of ideas of common properties of things. In understanding our particular idea, we begin to comprehend nature or God. Unlike imagination, sense experience cannot not provide all the information we need to form an adequate idea because senses only tell us

¹¹⁴ Letter 60.

¹¹⁵ E2p40s2.

¹¹⁶ E2p38.

about something in a given time and space. An adequate idea, then, is one under Eternity and not Duration, and is, further, a belief that is known to be true, *a priori*.¹¹⁷ There remains great debate in Spinoza scholarship today over the nature of the common notions.¹¹⁸ Knowledge from intuition (4) is knowledge proceeding “from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things.”¹¹⁹ This knowledge, then, arises from the intellectual consideration of the essence of an attribute itself, rather than from interaction of the modes of that attribute. Spinoza is obscure as to what, exactly, the intellectual love of God is. The intuitive essence of God, as well as our individual nature, is understood by apprehension, and not by any form of deductive activity.

Knowledge that arises from (1) and (2) are both sense-based forms of cognition. While it was not uncommon in early modern thought to base these two forms of cognition in bodily awareness, Spinoza goes further and maintains that they all have a parallel in the body (even if they are not sense-based). That which we come to know from objects, (1), are represented “through the senses in a way that is mutilated, confused, and without order for the intellect.”¹²⁰ Spinoza calls these “*experientia vaga*,” vague or random experience.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ E2p43s, E2p44, E2def4.

¹¹⁸ In the secondary literature there are two main camps on the interpretation of the common notions. There are those who read them as akin to natural laws. This camp takes Spinoza’s claim that motion and rest are common notions to mean that Spinoza is advocating a Cartesian claim that we can have adequate knowledge of physics, and therefore bodies. This account argues that common notions are of infinite modes. For a fuller account of this view, see Bennett (1984), Curley (1988, 1990) and Yirmiyahu Yovel (1989). On the other hand, there are those who read the common notions as adequate ideas of how bodies affect us. This is to say that, according to E2p39 and Spinoza’s parallelism, the laws of motion and rest must also have an expression as the common notions of thought. As such, they read Spinozistic common notions not a foundation for physics, but demonstrate what secure knowledge of modes in all attributes. For a fuller account of this view see Eric Schliesser (2011). I would like to thank Dr. Alison Peterman for pointing this distinction out to me.

¹¹⁹ E2p40s2.

¹²⁰ E2p35.

That which we come to know through hearsay, (2), arises “from the fact that having heard or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them ... through which we imagine them.”¹²² Knowledge from singular things and signs form the first kind of knowledge: imagination. Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd note, importantly, that by:

associating imagination with body, Spinoza does not downgrade it in relation to Mind. Mind's immediate confrontation with body is here seen as immediate access to something no less important, no less privileged in relation to ultimate reality than mind itself.¹²³

That said this knowledge remains, for Spinoza, relative or subjective, that is to say, inadequate (and it is the only one of the three that can be inadequate).¹²⁴ Spinoza writes at E2p19 that, “the human Mind does not know the human Body itself, nor does it know that it exists, except through ideas of affection by which the Body is affected,” and further, at E3p28, “the ideas of the affections of the human Body, insofar as they are related only to the human Mind, are not clear and distinct, but confused.”¹²⁵ It is clear, then, that he does not go so far as to say that there is *no* true knowledge that can arise from sense experience and mental imagery, but he does maintain that they are “mutilated [and] confused.”¹²⁶ Furthermore, ideas arising from imagination are the *sole* cause of falsity. This is, of course, not to imply that there is a sort of trans-attributable causation at play, merely that it is through imagination that it becomes clear that both body and mind can make errors of perception.¹²⁷

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² E2p40s2.

¹²³ Moira Gatens and Genevieve Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present*. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 12.

¹²⁴ E2p28s, E2p41d, E5p28d.

¹²⁵ E2p19, E3p28.

¹²⁶ E2p41.

¹²⁷ This is a difficult concept that I am glossing too quickly to do it justice. There is no shortage of interesting

A Spinozistic dictum is that the “order connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”¹²⁸ As such, it is as if Spinoza invites us to consider the individual from two sides of the same coin. As we have seen above, other bodies directly affect bodies. They move each other, change each other's ratios, and are shaped by all motion and rest around them. The “object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body,” and just as the body is neither atomic neither isolated nor is the idea of that body.¹²⁹ Gatens and Lloyd argue that this “togetherness” is the basis of imagination – the ground on which imagination takes place. “The mind,” they write, “incorporates ideas of other bodies, and those ideas can involve awareness of transitions to greater and fewer states of activity under the influence of congenial and rival forces,” even if those ideas are themselves inadequate.¹³⁰

That the mind can still regard things “as if they were present” demonstrates that the imagination gives us the ability to remember, in both a physical and mental sense.¹³¹ While the images themselves are only in the body, the mind represents these in thought, or that there is an imaginative representation of that bodily state. Juliana Merçon calls this “immediate awareness of local interactions.”¹³² Further, Spinoza writes that the ideas of affections, which have only to do with the mind and not the body, are “conclusions without premises, that is, they are confused ideas.”¹³³ That is to say, we are often aware of various

and well-researched material on the topic. To enter the debates see Curley (1969, 1984, 1999), Della Rocca (1996), Schliesser (2011, 2012), Wilson (1980), and Yovel (1994). Again, I owe many thanks to Dr. Alison Peterman for bringing to my attention to the complexity of the common notions.

¹²⁸ E2p7.

¹²⁹ E2p13.

¹³⁰ Gatens and Lloyd, *Collective Imaginings: Spinoza, Past and Present*, 14.

¹³¹ E2p17cor.

¹³² Juliana Merçon, “Relationality and Individuality in Spinoza,” *Revista Conatus Filosofia*. 2007, 57.

¹³³ E2p28 and dem. See also E2p12.

physical effects on our bodies, but not their causes and, therefore, reach these conclusions without premises when we do not have true and adequate ideas. Having inadequate ideas, or rather their falsity and ability to deceive us, often leads to the denigration of senses. Without proper understanding and connections of causes and effects in both our minds and bodies, we lose the immediate awareness of the local interactions if we completely disregard imagination.

Louis Althusser's reading of Spinoza is helpful here, and can help tether us back to political concerns.¹³⁴ Imagination fosters imitation and successive identification, and through this imitation and identification cultural norm are established and transmitted. Humans imitate each other and eventually identify these mutually imitated behaviours as the norm. For Althusser, imagination functions as an “apparatus” that performs two functions of ideology.¹³⁵ The first function allows us to place ourselves, as the human creatures, at the centre of meaning, and the secondly, it reverses the order of cause and effect so “reality seems to be organized teleologically in the service of human ends.”¹³⁶ While there are important aspects of imagination that help us understand and remember ourselves and other individuals, the outcome is that ideas are not *only* the result of personal vague and mutilated experiences, but “collective fictions.”¹³⁷ We collectively ascribe inverted effect to cause. The human individual is an illusion if taken to be the centre of meaning, and, therefore, this illusion creates false notions of cause and effect. However,

¹³⁴ Louis Althusser (1976, 1997), see also Warren Montag (1999), especially chapter 2, Hasana Sharp's *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, chapter 2, and Peter Thomas (2002).

¹³⁵ Althusser, “The Only Materialist Tradition, Part 1: Spinoza” Trans. T. Stolze. *The New Spinoza*. Ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 1997. 5-6, see also Althusser (1970).

¹³⁶ Hasana Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), 59, also Althusser, 6. Elapp.

¹³⁷ Merçon, “Relationality and Individuality in Spinoza,” 57.

simultaneously the human individual is participating in a system of integration. Despite being fictitious, these illusions are necessary for the integration of individuality or of unique self-hood. The level of imagination is an inadequate understanding; reason and common notions, however, allow a human and other types of individuals to understand their mediate causal connections.¹³⁸

Spinoza writes “inadequate and confused ideas follow with the same necessity as adequate, or clear and distinct ideas,” and while both adequate and inadequate ideas are equally necessary for Spinoza's system, falsity arises when a singular mind fails to understand clearly and distinctly (and as singular minds are necessary, so are their inadequate ideas).¹³⁹ In other words, inadequate ideas are not normative in the sense of “bad” or “wrong,” and moreover, they often arise when we fail to understand the true causes of thing. The Althusserian account does not seem to allow for falsity to occur as an *isolated* phenomenon in a “singular mind,” as ideology is a shared cultural phenomenon for Althusser. We are never, as stated above, individuals in a purely atomic sense. However, “all men are born ignorant of the causes of things,” and we often imagine certain things to be good because they are desirable, even if that imagined good prevents us from coming to the true knowledge of causes.¹⁴⁰ A potential consequence, on an Althusserian reading of inadequate ideas, is that, in refusing to see the true causes of things, which would allow us

¹³⁸ See Matheron “L'anthropologie spinoziste?” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 181-200, and Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, chapter 3 and 6. In this piece I will be speaking primarily about human individuals to set the stage for a discussion of human states. I do not wish to suggest, in speaking almost solely of humans, that we are the only kind of individual who experiences adequate knowledge merely that that is the example I use here. Similarly in the Ethics Spinoza speaks of the human because that is the creature whose ethical project he is interested in, and moreover, the only position he can speak confidently from.

¹³⁹ E2p36.

¹⁴⁰ E1app. I leave aside the broader question of human nature in Spinoza's writings. I share in the opinion that Spinoza is not, in fact, arguing for a unique or homogenous human nature with Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, chapter 3. See also Pierre-Francois Moreau (1994).

to recognize our communal participation in nature, we come to see ourselves as isolated individuals. Althusser's "collective fictions" are the outcome of a political experience rather than a metaphysical one.¹⁴¹ The individual dimension that is the focus of this thesis is often missing from Althusser's and other Marxian readings of Spinoza. My intent is not to reify an atomistic individual anathema to Spinoza's thought, but neither do I wish to lose the individual entirely to anti-humanism. Here, as elsewhere in Spinoza's quixotic writings, we should read on both registers. What should become obvious from the discussion above is that, so long as we are in possession of solely inadequate ideas, there is no way we can try to do so. Samuel Shirley wrote, "perspective was at the center of Spinoza's system. His thinking shows a passion for unity and totality, coupled with scrupulous fidelity to the integrity of the individual particular."¹⁴²

In the following section, I explicate the role of necessary and common adequate ideas in the conception of the extended individual. Finally, I will return to the third knowledge, intuition, or intellectual love of God or Nature.

3.2 Adequate Ideas: Reason and the Common Notions

The first knowledge, imagination, furnishes human individuals with inadequate ideas. However, these inadequate ideas are not always false, and moreover, it is imagination that provides the capacity for memory and speculative thought. It is also what allows us social subjectivity and the ability to create norms. However, the second knowledge, reason, also aids in shaping our "collective fictions" while also enabling our

¹⁴¹ Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, 93.

¹⁴² Samuel Shirley, *Spinoza: Complete Works*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), 6.

ability to *transform* them.

When the mind understands things on the basis of reason, it is “determined internally, from the fact that it regards a number of things at once to understand their agreements, differences and oppositions.”¹⁴³ However, knowledge of the second kind, that is to say, reason, is not a set of innate or endowed ideas. It is the power of individual minds to “generate ideas from its idiosyncratic, singular nature,” however they do not house “a set of stable, objective, eternal ideas.”¹⁴⁴ Spinoza clearly demonstrates that adequate ideas express the virtue, or power, of individual minds, *via* their individual reason. Adequate understanding of the interactions either between bodies or ideas increases the mind’s power. Even if, as Gilles Deleuze says, common notions are biological understandings that allow the mind to understand resemblances and differences “from the inside,” or inherently from its own power, this does not create an atomic individual.¹⁴⁵ The individual is never itself solely in isolation, that is, the power or virtue that a particular mind has in understanding cause and effect does not cut that mind off from the whole of nature. Rather, by understanding the proper order of cause and effect, and one’s place in it, individuals diminish their individuation by realizing their place in the causal order as well as their similarity with other beings, while they never sacrifice their individuality.¹⁴⁶ I have mentioned the differentiation of these terms above and will elaborate on the precise nature of this difference below. For now, I wish only to imply that an individual mind or body that becomes powerful by sharing in the common notions has a dual action of individuating and

¹⁴³ E2p29s.

¹⁴⁴ Sharp, *Spinoza and the Politics of Renaturalization*, 96.

¹⁴⁵ E2def 4. Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, Trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 278.

¹⁴⁶ E4p35. Amelie Rorty, “Two Faces of Spinoza,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, (1987), 312.

highlighting what are only perceived differences. It is a shift, in the *Ethics*, from the singular expressions of the imagination to the common notions that illustrate this distinction.

While Spinoza shows that the mind's ideas of the body, its duration, and its parts are all inadequate, as is the mind's idea of itself, he does not doubt the possibility of adequate ideas. Unfortunately, he does not provide explicit examples of the common notions, but they are said to be conceptions of things "which are common to all, and which are equally in the part as in the whole."¹⁴⁷ Because they are common to all (or at the very least to many), and occur both part and whole, they can *only* be adequate. The human mind conceives things adequately when there is something that is common to both the human body and the external bodies by which it is affected (be they human or not), and equally in the part as in the whole of each. For something to be common, for example, to a human body, it must be present in that human body and the external body that affects it, and in the *affection* itself. The mind, for its part, will have an idea of each body as well as an unconfused idea of the affection. It is not altogether clear what exactly comprises these common notions since they seem limited to ideas of extremely general features of physical objects. We might say, though, that extension itself is one of the common notions in that it is something that all finite bodies share. What is clear, however, is that when we have inadequate ideas they follow our particular bodily affections (which we intuit as having happened by chance or free choice), whereas the common notions exceed our particular situations. He notes that geometry is an excellent example of this deductive reasoning.

Since the common notions take place through the affections of bodies or ideas with

¹⁴⁷ E2p38.

which we share affections, they can be local occurrences, which is to say, that they are often generated by spatial proximity to an individual body or the mind. Hasana Sharp argues that humans are locally affected in many ways, which, implies “humans can *generate* increasingly many common ideas by way of contact.”¹⁴⁸ Sharp notes that the more diverse bodies and ideas affect each other at the local level, the more diverse they become.¹⁴⁹ Our “agreements and differences” shape our reason and create a space for the richness of human diversity.¹⁵⁰ She is correct to emphasize that the Latin Spinoza uses in E2p29s for agreement is *convenientia* (from *convenio*), which can be translated as “a meeting, a coming together, or an assembly,” and need not be read as conveying sameness.¹⁵¹ As humans approach the third knowledge, intuition or love of God (*amor dei intellectualis*), we recognize the similarities we have with others through our diverse engagements with them. As such, we never lose our individuality while we are alive (i.e., as so long as our *conatus* continues to keep striving for being in our unique ratio), but the more rational and adept, the more we participate in adequate ideas, the less we are individuated from one another. If the inadequate ideas obscure our ability to understand ourselves as both part and whole, then it is *via* the adequate ideas, or the common notions, that this starts to become possible. My aim here is to have travelled from the inadequate to the adequate to show the evolving way we come to think of ourselves as parts of a whole. If this is still somewhat obscure at this point, it will become clearer in the following section.

¹⁴⁸ Sharp, *The Politics of Renaturalization*, 98. Here, I take her to mean contact in the physical, as well as in the mental, sense.

¹⁴⁹ This is also clear from the postulates of the “physical interlude”.

¹⁵⁰ E2p29s.

¹⁵¹ Sharp, *The Politics of Renaturalization*, 99.

3.3 Individuation vs. Individuality

In chapter two, I suggested that there is a meaningful difference between notions of individuation and individuality in Spinoza's system. His notion of inadequate and adequate ideas will help us understand this distinction. Inadequate ideas, we should recall, arise from mistaken, confused, and imagined causal relationships. E2p32 reminds us, "all ideas, insofar as they are related to God, are true." As we have discussed above, this is because they "agree entirely with their objects."¹⁵² In correctly understanding cause and effect in ourselves, and other bodies, we then correctly understand our place in God or nature. It is worth asking how exactly this effects individuation and individuality.

Beginning with Spinoza's account of the soul can be helpful. Above, I have laid out the ways in which adequate and inadequate ideas operate in general terms. However, it is worth noting that, for Spinoza, the soul is the very idea of the body. In the *Short Treatise*, he makes this clear. Our soul is the over-arching idea of body and is said to be immortal as our eternal essence.¹⁵³ This is a good point to note, once more, that Spinoza uses traditional terms in a surprising and almost inverted manner. The soul, while our body maintains its unique ratio, is aware of the changes of our motion and rest. It is not a traditional view of the soul in that when our body dies, the soul no longer continues on with any remember of our essential selves. The soul itself does not retain any sense of us in the aspect of Duration, but continues to exist in the mind of God under the aspect of Eternity.

¹⁵² E2p32dem.

¹⁵³ E1p8, E4p29 and proof, E4p39note. When Spinoza was 23, a South American Monk visited him and reported that he, Spinoza, had been excommunicated from the Jewish community, in part, for holding that the soul dies with the body. See Curley (2002).

When an individual thinks of its genesis in the correct manner it not only changes the “thinking of reality” but also the total reality of the individual's mind from inadequate to adequate. As such, the more an individual operates with adequate ideas, the more it is *aware* of its integration with nature. Of course, it also simultaneously becomes an increasingly active body during this process as well. The individual possesses, as a result, more adequate networks and relations. The very soul or idea of the individual expands to encompass a greater series of understandings. Just as the physical body is affected in a great many ways by a great many bodies and becomes more active, and thus possessing of an individuality, the soul of the individual experiences the same expansion. Heidi Ravven notes that:

in absorbing the determining ideas, the distinction between what is internal and what is external to the individual are shown to be inadequate. However, it is important to note that as boundaries are reshaped in virtue of the mind's assimilation of the general order of causality, the original limited individual is reconfigured but its individuality is not extinguished – it is, indeed, enhanced.¹⁵⁴

Our bodies and minds are enhanced, on this reading, as we *incorporate* adequate causal understandings of ourselves. It is important here to recall the definition of adequate ideas: “by adequate idea I understand an idea which, in so far as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties or intrinsic marks of a true idea.”¹⁵⁵ As the process of self-actualizing takes place there are no new elements being introduced to the individual; it remains what it always was. What takes place during an immanent transformation of the individual is that she realizes the common notion in her essence,

¹⁵⁴ Merçon, “Relationality and Individuality in Spinoza,” 57.

¹⁵⁵ E2def4.

conceived only through herself, in the correct causal order that are shared with others.¹⁵⁶

As Amelie Rorty notes, “as ideas become increasingly adequate, individuation is diminished (E4p35). To the extent that two individuals have increasingly adequate ideas, they are decreasingly differentiated.”¹⁵⁷ Insofar as our bodies and souls agree, we overcome our differences and are able to mitigate the illusion of atomistic individuality. The lack of discrete individuality might be rather worrisome on two fronts. On the one hand, it may seem unappealing to think of our discrete individuality as nothing more than an inadequate understanding of our place in nature. Undoubtedly, we would rather believe we have correctly understood ourselves as a unique self. On the other hand, there is the worry that as we realize our sameness we erase racial or gendered differences. In such a way, certain others are instrumentalized because they are not “like us,” or we fail to recognize such distinctiveness in the first place. The conditions that generate racism, sexism, or other prejudices, among different humans are based in inadequate reasoning. Inasmuch as Rorty is correct, this implies a universal human nature, and entail that what is not like us is inhuman. It is true, for Spinoza, that we share in a nature that drives us persevere. However, if we are able to do so while embracing reason or the intellectual love of God, we realize that our perseverance lies in mutuality. That this is the case will become very important for Spinoza’s politics. It is almost important to note here the ways in which Spinoza diverges from the more traditional account of human nature as an exterior goal we should strive towards. For Spinoza, human nature is that which we are, which does include, and will

¹⁵⁶ Curley (1973) maintains that this should be thought of as a genetic account, 43. Deleuze, (1992) in chapter 8, maintains a similar point. Not only is the definition of a thing in *KV* genetic, he maintains that this form of genesis is the only role mathematics plays in Spinoza's corpus, see particularly 133-136.

¹⁵⁷ Rorty, “Two Faces of Spinoza,” 312.

always include in virtue of our passions, anti-social behaviors and conflict. However, Rorty's distinction between the individuation and individuality of a person is helpful to understanding what is at stake in Spinoza's theory, even if it is a dual register we inhabit that is often difficult to maintain in harmony because of our passions. Rorty's reading may be a particular one though it obviously follows both Matheron and Balibar in spirit. It is not unusual, of course, to read Spinoza as a philosopher who is uniquely concerned with understanding the ways we who, as parts in a whole and as wholes with parts, participate in individuality and totality.

The doctrine of the *conatus* can speak to the first worry. The universal striving to persevere in being imbue in us a deep desire to avoid death, or the termination of our stable ratio. Sharp suggests that this instills in us the ability, which is certainly not always expressed, to be "mutually useful to one another."¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, we do maintain ourselves in this striving, and it can be utilized in mutually beneficial ways. Moreover, the *Short Treatise* was written before the introduction of Spinoza's theory of the *conatus*. As both Merçon and Ravven note, there are considerable contradictions found in the *Ethics* regarding the extendible character of the individual as I have tried to highlight above. There is worry that as the *conatus* becomes more active it will, in fact, increasingly separate us rather than bring us together as I wish to suggest in this chapter. Merçon and Ravven stress that a clearer picture of Spinoza's ontology, and subsequently his theory of individuation, can be found in the *Short Treatise*, despite, or perhaps despite the fact that Spinoza does not discuss the *conatus* there.

In the *Short Treatise*, the progression from the first knowledge to the second entails

¹⁵⁸ Sharp, *Politics of Renaturalization*, 101.

that the soul loses its unique connection to its body's sensations. It proceeds from a local interaction with itself to an extension that unites it with other bodies. The preface of chapter two tells us that our bodies maintain a ratio in the face of their interaction with other bodies and that such changes cannot occur without our soul's awareness of it. Further, should our ratio be disturbed, this would mark the death for our body and the destruction of our soul as that which is aware of body in Duration, unless we have achieved adequate reflection in the form of divine love. In doing so, we have “been able to know and love this [substance] also, as well as that of extension; and uniting itself with these substances ... it has been able to make itself eternal.”¹⁵⁹ Earlier, in chapter one, Spinoza notes “each thing in itself has a striving to preserve itself in its state, and bring itself into a better one.”¹⁶⁰ There exists within each an impetus, a striving, to remain our own local individual, but simultaneously there exists a desire to dissolve oneself, in some sense, into adequate knowledge of God. That is to say, our striving occurs in both part and whole.¹⁶¹

Unlike the notion of striving in the *Ethics*, that is affectivity and the underpinning of emotion, the notion of striving in the *Short Treatise* appears more circumscribed. There, we strive either to maintain our self-identity in our connection to our bodily form, *or* we strive to consider ourselves as eternal within the whole of nature. The body is the first thing that the soul is aware of; it is the soul that is the idea of that body, in both parts and whole. Spinoza writes that this soul, or idea, “cannot find rest in the knowledge of the body” without becoming united, as one, in love. It is in this way we maintain our identity with our

¹⁵⁹ KV 2 pref.

¹⁶⁰ KV 1, 5.

¹⁶¹ This can be seen as an analogue to Freud’s drive theory, mainly The Pleasure Principle and The Death Drive. See Freud (1960).

bodily form. When we are able to understand adequately our connection to the whole, only then “can [we] truly say that we have been born again” in the love of God or nature.¹⁶²

Both Merçon and Ravven argue that this distinction between Spinoza's work pre- and post-*conatus* allows us to make an important distinction between adequate and inadequate conceptions of individuality. This debate has quite obvious implications for my overall thesis. Ravven writes, “group mind and the body politic are not mere metaphors ... even though they are surely inadequate both materially and conceptually,” and while she is correct in noting the movement of striving from the *Short Treatise* to the *Ethics* it is, and the problems it may pose for an expansive notion of an inter-connected individual. I argue that it is ultimately a mistake to suggest that the notion of individuality and individuation should be taken from the *Short Treatise* only.¹⁶³ The more mature *Ethics* simply provides the clearer picture of his thought. Explaining individuality without the more robust notion of desire in the doctrine of the *conatus* cannot yet provide in the *Short Treatise* an account of the part-whole distinction, nor does it do justice to Spinoza's more mature thought. He clearly thought that the introduction of the *conatus* was an improvement on his past thought, and it would be disingenuous to leave it out.

However, a part of Ravven's account of individuation and individuality is perfectly amenable to the doctrine of the *conatus*. That we are relational, permeable and expansive individuals is, I believe, the correct interpretation of Spinoza's theory of individuation. Recognizing the importance of the *conatus* gives Spinoza's theory a deeper and more subtle explanation of the oscillation that finite modes experience between individuation and

¹⁶² KV 2, 22.

¹⁶³ Ravven, “Spinoza's Individualism Reconsidered: Some Lessons from the Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being,” 404.

individuality, which is to say the oscillation between inadequate, or imaginative, and adequate, or relational ideas, as well as those related to an intellectual love of God.

3.4 Ethical Egoism and Relationality

As the postulates in the “physical interlude” demonstrate, the human body can be thought to consist of the organic and inorganic bodies that surround it, for all complex individuals are made up of other individuals that, despite being a part of another, larger, whole maintain their own integrity. I am affected and affect this computer on which I work and as such, during this process it is a part of my individuality. This fact would seem opposed to a certain Spinoza who writes, “when each man seeks his own advantage for himself, then men are most useful to one another.”¹⁶⁴ Here, I wish to address the issue of ethics that emerge from the *Ethics*, and more precisely to address the issues of egoism and relationality.

Some argue that Spinoza's ethical system is Hobbesian in that it argues that human creatures are essentially egoist in nature, and further, that he advocates a primacy of the individual and a prudential naturalism. Hampshire, Bennett, and Nadler argue that Spinoza begins with Hobbesian egoism, but transcends this simple egoism with his notion of intellectual love of God that sees beyond the isolated individual. Andrew Collier and Matheron contend that there is never truly an isolated individual to begin with, but something relational. I take Bennett, Steven Nadler, and Stuart Hampshire to be correct in maintaining that what we begin with is egoism that is, in a manner of speaking, transcended

¹⁶⁴ E435cor2.

through adequate reflection. However, I do follow Andrew Collier and Matheron in maintaining that there was never a truly isolated agent to begin with as should be clear from the preceding two chapters. Thus, we need to differentiate quasi-egoism from isolated individuality. E4p18s may be a useful place to look in order to understand Spinoza's social relations. It will also serve as a good place to end our examination of the metaphysical writings and turn to his political treatise:

We can think of none more excellent than those which agree entirely with our 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 ... Man, I say, can wish for nothing more helpful than 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.¹⁶⁵

E1p17s says, "a man is the cause of the existence of another man, but not his essence... hence, they can agree entirely according to their essence." For example, Alex and Jo might be the cause of their child, insofar as they are that child's parents, but they do not create the child's essence. While all humans are capable of agreeing in essence because we share such a similar essence in virtue of our species, later Spinoza reminds us that "insofar as men are subject to our passions," we are not the same in nature, or that the passions can fracture us from one another.¹⁶⁶ We are unable to do away with our passions, as they are a part of who and what we are, even as this means that we clash and are awful to one another. But if we follow the intellectual love of God, we can mitigate the passive and destructive consequence of our passions.¹⁶⁷ However, Spinoza's reading of *Genesis*, particularly the story of Adam and Eve, clearly demonstrates that he does believe that it is possible for two

¹⁶⁵ E4p18s

¹⁶⁶ E4p32.

¹⁶⁷ E4p4c, E4p34.

humans (as opposed to two simple bodies, or compound bodies with simple parts) to agree completely. He writes, “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.”¹⁶⁸ The use of each other is a reciprocal endeavor that is both ethical and guided by reason, and not only by the passions.

The individual is always “in practice wider both in body and in mind than the bounds of a person's skin.”¹⁶⁹ That said, we may in practice be wider than our skin, but that does not mean that we *know* or *understand* that we are part of a larger nature. To illustrate this claim, it is useful to turn to Spinoza’s definition of virtue. For Spinoza, virtue is not only a quest for personal salvation but also a project of the modifying the people around us, and aiding in transforming their character.¹⁷⁰ Virtue is itself synonymous with power, and the more one is able “to seek his own advantage ... the more he is endowed with virtue.”¹⁷¹ Power, then, is the preservation in our being and the active possession of adequate knowledge that one uses to influence others’ natures. That is not to say, however, that we can redefine virtue as egoism. Even the egoist will believe she can influence another’s nature. For Spinoza, the ethical element comes into play precisely as we extending ourselves for the betterment of others. While we begin with egoism in Spinoza’s ethical theory, the influence of our positive power is done in the spirit of love, joy, and friendship. “It is of the first importance to men to establish close relationships ... and, as an absolute

¹⁶⁸ E4p68s. See Sharp (2012) for a truly insightful reading of this point, I follow her here.

¹⁶⁹ Ravven, 389.

¹⁷⁰ Steven Nadler, “The Lives of Others: Spinoza on Benevolence as a Rational Virtue,” unpublished. I wish to thank Dr. Nadler for his help with this particular issue, and for allowing me to read his as of yet unpublished work. It was very helpful.

¹⁷¹ Ep20dem, E4p20.

rule, to act in such a way as serves to strengthen friendship.”¹⁷² In understanding the causes of the negative, or passive, affects in our lives we can hold back “hatred, anger, envy, derision, pride and similar emotions” and attempt to “repay with love or nobility an other’s hatred, anger, contempt.”¹⁷³ One might say that true egoism, properly understood, is when we love others with the same love we give ourselves because we recognize their commonality we share in God. Adequate knowledge is power, and power is virtue. The virtuous individual for Spinoza is then knowledgeable and possesses power under all attributes, all of which are active states of being.

That which agrees with my nature is good, and this is by definition what is “good” for Spinoza.¹⁷⁴ What is good for my nature is what enables me to participate actively in knowledge, power, and virtue. The good, therefore, is not what we tend towards, but is immanent to our own natural processes. E4p68s: “when man found woman, who agreed entirely with his own nature, he realized that there could be nothing in Nature more to his advantage than woman,” reminds us that, for Spinoza, the things that agree most with our nature are the things that most resemble us.¹⁷⁵ For example, it is Adam who debases himself by imitating the affects of beasts, and is subsequently banished from Eden, as the rest of E4p68s tells us. It was with Eve that Spinoza believes he has the more perfect agreement, because she is human and therefore he will have the most in common with her.¹⁷⁶ The virtuous individual, who is motivated by reason, will act in such a way that she promotes virtue and rationality in others, and in such a manner which their *conatus* and

¹⁷² E4app.

¹⁷³ E4p73s, E4p46.

¹⁷⁴ E4p31.

¹⁷⁵ E4p68s.

¹⁷⁶ See Sharp (2012).

power is increased and ours as well. In this way we can, potentially, strive together and “seek together the common advantage of all” and we can “compose, as it were, one mind and one body,” in solidarity.¹⁷⁷ Once more I must stress the dual register always taking place in Spinoza's work. What is at stake is the navigation of individuation and individuality, and moreover, how an individual more complex than a human can be said to exist “as if” by one mind or body.

In this chapter, though I have covered much ground, I have given an account of the role of inadequate and adequate knowledge and how these forms of knowledge directly correspond to the formation of an individual. I have argued that to the extent that humans possess adequate knowledge they increasingly lose their discrete individuation. This *individuation* is a confused and imagined notion of discrete selfhood. As we gain adequate knowledge, however, I maintain that we do not lose our *individuality*. Our *conatus* is the element of ourselves that tethers us to our own individuality. Following this, I have given an account of virtue, power, and rationality as the key to understanding how humans may potentially join their active forces together. It remains to be seen if that potential can be actualized, or if it is a mere metaphor in Spinoza's system, or how to read the *veluti* distinction.

A few questions emerge from this account of the union of many people into one larger and subsequently more powerful, individual as “one mind and one body.” The ratio of such an enlarged individual would seem inherently difficult to maintain. Would the short-lived nature of such an individual compromise such individuality? Does an assemblage such as this possess a soul in the way a human individual does? Is it perhaps

¹⁷⁷ E4p18s.

possible that we can speak of this union in coherent metaphysical terms, but not in political ones? Is it possible for human individuals ever to agree enough in nature to join to create such an individual? In the following chapter, I begin to address this question by turning to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* and the *Tractatus Politicus*.

Chapter IV

Transitions

In chapter three, I have examined the individual in expansive terms. It is clear that we can parse out a physical theory of individuation and individuality from the “physical interlude.” However, in appealing to Spinoza's parallelism, I have dedicated chapter three to the individuation of ideas and mind, having dealt with the body in chapter two. The prospect of explaining Spinoza's theory of individuation in terms of mind seems, on the one hand, quite easy. If the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of bodies, then we can say that for Spinoza the process of individuation and individuality happens in the same manner.¹⁷⁸ However we need to make this more concrete and detailed.

In the previous chapter, I have offered a nuanced view of the process of individuation and individuality from the side of mind. On my reading, the individuation of the mind hinges on the distinction between inadequate and adequate ideas. In having a correct understanding of the three kinds of knowledge in Spinoza, we can begin to understand his so-called ethical egoism as well as the ultimate underlying relationality of his system. Inadequate ideas result from the imagination, which, while useful, are the source of error. The egoism from which his ethics begins is thus based on imagined notions. It is inaccurate to view humans as Hobbesian agents who act solely from egoist and self-preserving desires through the imagination. While the Hobbesian account is not entirely untrue for Spinoza, it is not the whole picture – hence inadequate. The love of God,

¹⁷⁸ E2p7.

that is, adequately understanding, which surpasses knowledge of the second kind that is restricted to the properties of common things and begins to illuminate the ultimate interdependence of our actions and the power of God or nature as the immanent cause. This third knowledge more clearly illuminates the massive points of connection between every individual, both in mind and body, and, moreover, contributes to diminished individuation. We become less differentiated the more we can understand our basic similarity through our involvement in substance. That said we never lose our individuality, merely gain the ability to see ourselves in a dual register. Our power lies in our passions, in our very desiring. Our *conatus* grants us our specific *ingenium* or character.

In this chapter and the next, I will begin to unpack how one can read Spinoza as grounding the connection between our preservation via the *conatus* and the community. Etienne Balibar's notion of transindividuality allows us to understand the inadequate and adequate ideas as systems with different integrations. In inadequate systems, as I have said, we bounce back and fourth among different kinds of illusions, one of which is thinking ourselves as discrete atomic agents. In adequate systems, we can both recognize our specificity that lies in our differing passions and *conatus* while also acknowledging our fundamental commonality. My thesis is that our current political vocabulary does not allow us to understand Spinoza — even 400 years later since we are still stuck in this dualism of self and community. This leads to many one-sided accounts of Spinoza, even among his best interpreters.

This returns us to the metaphysical doctrine of individuation in the *Ethics*. There is ample proof in the text to demonstrate that it should not be considered simply as related to our physical embodiment. Moreover, Spinoza's parallelism demonstrates that even if we do

not find an explicit argument in his text to read the notion of individuation and individuality in metaphysical terms, it undoubtedly exists in the spirit of the text. There always has been a split between those thinkers who focus on his politics and those who focus his metaphysics. However there is a clear line between the two and the task here is to sketch that line with the hope of integrating the two, not merely to read them in parallel. Can we expand on Spinoza's metaphysical commitments to his theory of individuality through his political writings? I make clear the answer is yes.

Before turning to chapter five and the question of the state-as-individual, I want to address the individual within the state. The question of the part and the whole is no less significant here than the question of individual as part in the whole of nature. I wish to address the individual in terms of right and power (*jus* and *potentia*) very briefly before turning to a more detailed analysis in chapter five. In the *TTP*, Spinoza defines law, right, order, and power in the sections in which he makes an appeal to the notion of the individual (*individuum*). Laws, we find, demand in an “absolute sense” that each individual, or all individuals of the same kind, “behave in one and the same fixed and determined way, depending upon either natural necessity or a human decision.”¹⁷⁹ This can describe laws of nature, social laws, or the individual to which they apply, and further it is sufficiently all encompassing. Laws always, in an absolute sense, compel individuals.

Definitionally, right and order are nothing but the laws of nature that dictate how an individual is to exist and to operate. The right of an individual, then, is the way it is naturally determined to be. Spinoza uses the example of fish to illustrate his point. Fish are determined to exist in water, to swim, and big fish eat smaller ones. The natural right of an

¹⁷⁹ *TTP* 4/1.

individual is coextensive with what is possible for that individual. A fish can no more exist out of water than can a human under water. Spinoza writes that this natural right is in fact the same thing as the power of that individual.¹⁸⁰ One might worry that he repeats the Platonic view from the *Republic* that we each have by nature (*kata phusin*) a particular role, but rather it is the right of the individual *qua* individual to maintain itself; it does this “as far as it can,” and it takes “no account of an other's circumstance.”¹⁸¹ This is its “sovereign right” to persevere in itself.¹⁸² If an individual does not do these things, it ceases to be what it was before. It is determined to be exactly what it is or it faces destruction. Matheron is correct here to note that there is no circularity in claiming that what an individual *is* and what an individual *does* are, while different conceptually, the same thing.¹⁸³ Moreover, the collective power of nature is the accumulation of every individual's power, or right, to persevere.

These same points as made in chapter two the *TP*. Spinoza writes, “the natural right of Nature as a whole, and consequently the natural right of every individual, is coextensive with its power,” and further every individual thing “endeavors to persevere his own being as far as in him lies.”¹⁸⁴ In the *Ethics*, Spinoza is clear that this same power lies at the heart of an individual's essence, in her *conatus*. I have argued that as an individual attains the third kind of knowledge, it is the *conatus* that keeps an individual from dissolving entirely into the background of the totality of nature. If the foundation of an individual is synonymous with the activity of their being, then all individuals are necessarily determined

¹⁸⁰ TTP 16/2.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, 12. See also E1p36.

¹⁸⁴ TP 2/4-8.

to exist and to operate in a certain way.

It is important to note the difference in the terms for power that Spinoza uses in his texts. When describing power as co-extensive with natural right Spinoza always uses a cognate of *potentia*, whereas when he is discussing authority, the power that is external to the essential power of the individual, he uses the term *potestas*. I can grant my power to another person in such a way that I give them authority over me, such as entering a social compact, or something more frivolous such as getting on a ride in a fair. In both cases, I lose some control over my situation, but I could never give away my more fundamental power unless I ceased to be an individual.

Spinoza tells us that this power is co-extensive with our nature is not something that is universally the same. In the case of the fish, this seems fairly obvious. My nature is quite different from the nature of the fish, and *vice versa*. However, this remains the case even among individuals who are far more similar than a human is to a fish. Once more we need to consider the implication of our unique fixed ratios and passions. To maintain myself in my ratio, I might have very different desires from someone who is in so many ways similar to myself. For example, I may require medication to function that my friend does not.

Spinoza writes that we may conclude:

It is not in every man's power (*postestate*) always to use reason and to be at the highest pitch of human freedom, but yet he always endeavors as far as is in him lies to preserve his own being and ... whether he be wise or ignorant, whatever he endeavors and does, he endeavors and does by the sovereign right of Nature.¹⁸⁵

Human beings, then, may not always have the ability to control their passions in such a way that they follow adequate knowledge towards what will best preserve them, but whatever

¹⁸⁵ TP 2/8.

we do, we do in accord with nature.

A consequence of my reading of Spinoza's theory of individuation, as applied to the state, is obvious. Since an individual as much right as power, claiming the state is an individual forces us to adopt the same claim for the state. It seems that the state, operating by sovereign right, should just do whatever is in its power to do; however the parts of that state might suffer. The examples from history of such cases are multitudinous. The worry would be that Spinoza gives us no way normatively to critique these actions. His ontology seems to grant that such actions are nothing more than the course of nature. This is, I believe, true. Within Spinoza's politics, it is correct to say that all atrocities are part of nature, which is the implication of his immanence. However, that this is the case does not, I argue, determine all states to be cruel and unimpeachable for all time. Both the *TTP* and *TP* (but especially the *TP*) show Spinoza attempting to demonstrate that while many egregious actions are not unnatural, or even immoral, they need not take place. The global atrocities that many states have perpetuated are the result of inadequate knowledge, of an over-indulgence in negative and passive passions. This is not to avoid the question of normativity. Spinoza's writings are not devoid of explicit guidelines for action, and even if such concepts as "good" and "bad" are dependent on what is good and bad for us. His ethical writings do give us, as Michael LeBuffe notes, universal prescriptions for resisting passions, norms for agents insofar as they are rational, and norms for agents insofar as they are irrational.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, his political writings, especially the *TP* give ample norms for different kinds of political constitutions. The whole project of the *TP* is, in fact, to explain

¹⁸⁶ See Michael LeBuffe (2007).

the most rational and least harmful ways to govern a state.¹⁸⁷

This sounds as if the state is itself operating under the same conditions as is an individual human, that is, as I have suggested, other individual encompassed in Spinoza's definition. It is perhaps the case that states are particularly unstable individuals that do not maintain their unique fixed ratios with much success, relatively speaking, because just like other individuals they suffer immensely from inadequate ideas. However, in the final passages of chapter 17 of the *TTP* concerning the disobedience of the Hebrews and their failed state, Spinoza is rather explicit about what a nation is *not*:

Was it by nature? Nature certainly does not create peoples, individuals do, and individuals are separated into nations by differences of language, law and morality. It can only be from these latter factors, namely law and morality, that each nation has its unique character, its unique condition, and its unique prejudices.¹⁸⁸

It is, of course, a nation (*natio*) and a people (*gens*), not a state (*imperium*) that Spinoza writes of in this passage, but these remarks are important to bear in mind as we continue. If a nation is something like an artificial aggregate of human individuals, whereas the cyclone, or the totality of the face of nature, *is* an individual there are serious questions to ask of the theory of individuation. This is precisely what I will be investigating in the following chapter. In this chapter, I have pointed to a few key places in the political writings to which we should turn to find the links to the metaphysical writings in the *Ethics*.

¹⁸⁷ A second important question arises here: Does that not reduce his entire political project to a form of neo-Stoic quietism? See: Susan James (2007, 2011), Firmin DeBrabander (2011), Aurelia Armstrong (2013), Derek Pereboom (1994), Olli Kristeller (1984) and Matheron (1994). I am not prepared to answer this question here, but do not believe it does.

¹⁸⁸ *TTP* 17/26. See also the Shirley translation: "Was it by nature? But surely nature creates individuals, not nations, and it is only difference of language, of laws, and of established custom that divides individuals into nations. And only the last two, laws and custom, can be the source of the particular character, the particular mode of life, the particular set of attitudes that signalize each nation." And Barbone's: "And what about nature? Nature certainly does not create nations, but individuals, which are not distinguished by nationalities but by the diversity of language, laws and accepted mores."

Curley, for example, has suggested that the *TTP* should be read as a prolegomenon to the *Ethics*,

Not only in the sense that it is an attempt to remove the prejudice standing in the way of an appreciation of the philosophical argument of the *Ethics*, ... but also in the sense that it is an attempt to present, in a less forbidding, non-geometrical form ... many of the teachings of the *Ethics*.¹⁸⁹

I would argue that we could extend the same argument to the *TP*.¹⁹⁰ The passages I have highlighted from both texts help us flesh out what an individual truly is in Spinoza's corpus. Turning to the explanations of the law, right, and power helps expand the notion of the essence of the individual. Having already argued that it is the *conatus* that is the key to the perseverance of all individuals, utilizing the political writings we can extend this to the larger question regarding the nature of the individual in the state. At first glance, it seems likely that all that we have examined in chapter two and three along with the key places in the political writing allows us to give an account of the state as individual in both physical and ideal terms. However, the *TTP* seems to make clear that, in fact, a nation is not an individual, but merely an aggregate.¹⁹¹

In the following chapter, I will address the issue of the state as individual much more closely. I first give an account of Matheron's naturalist interpretation, which sees the state as a true individual. From there, I move to the accounts of Barbone and Rice, who give a quasi-individual account. While they deny the state is a true individual, they do concede that it has many individual-like attributes. Finally, I turn to the work of Balibar to reframe these questions. Balibar argues that for Spinoza reality is composed of transindividuals that

¹⁸⁹ Curley, "Notes on a Neglected Masterpiece (II): The *Theological-Political Treatise* as a Prolegomenon to the *Ethics*," *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy* Ed. Bennett et al, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1990), 113.

¹⁹⁰ As does Barbone, "What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza?" 96.

¹⁹¹ *TTP* 17/26.

are always already embedded in ever-widening webs of relations. In any event, this discussion builds on what I have shown in this chapter, namely that it is not only possible, but also imminently useful, to understand the expansive scope of the theory of individuation in Spinoza's work in political terms, *via* concepts of law, right, and power in the *TTP* and the *TP*, which is inseparable from his metaphysics. It is my beliefs that these concepts help us understand more dimensions of what it means to be an individual for Spinoza. The human individual never leaves the state of nature, but is also part of a state, and how that changes and shapes what it means for human individuality becomes important as we continue to ask if the state itself can be an individual. How do law, right and power affect it?

Chapter V

Individuals and Community

The previous chapter leads us to a particularly difficult question in Spinoza's ontology: is the state an individual? That a state is an entity in a natural sense in Spinoza's thought is clear: "if many individuals concur in one action so that simultaneously they cause one effect, to that extent do I consider them to be a single thing."¹⁹² This is to say that the state, in so far as it has one total effect, is rightly called a singular thing. However how can we best account for the nature of the state? One attempt would be to consider the physical dimensions of the state, say by its territory. For example, Canada has physical borders that change over time, and like a human body, it remains the same individual even if those borders change. If the rivers enlarge or dry up, new cities pop up or die out, etc., it remains the same state.¹⁹³ On this account, Canada came into being as a new individual, perhaps in 1867, even if the same land (more or less) existed prior to Confederation, European discovery, or the existence of *homo sapiens*. States clearly have individual properties, and one can argue that this reading of the state would entail, because of Spinoza's parallelism, that a state would also necessarily have corresponding ideas. Recall chapter 3.2 in the *TP* Spinoza writes, "the right of the state or of the sovereign is nothing more than the right of Nature itself and is determined by the power not of each individual but of a people which is guided *as if* by one mind."¹⁹⁴ Given what

¹⁹² E2d7.

¹⁹³ Spinoza means by state also *imperium*, which is not the modern nation-state, but something like a community or state of affairs.

¹⁹⁴ TP 3/2.

we have seen in chapter four, namely that power, virtue and right all share a common place in Spinoza's ontology; this seems to tell us that the power (*potestas*) of a state is one of a collective power. This is not a correct understanding of Spinoza's texts. That said neither is it entirely correct to say that Spinoza is merely using a metaphor here. In this chapter, then, my aim is to explore contemporary readings of the state-as-individual in Spinoza's texts. The general theme of investigation shifts here from a more thorough search in Spinoza's texts, outwards to other interpretations of this problem. I do this by looking at three main types of interpretation. I call them (1) the naturalist or literalist, (2) the "quasi-individual" or metaphorist, and (3) the transindividual.¹⁹⁵

I begin with the naturalist position attributed largely to Matheron. His account begins from the physical to demonstrate the essence of the state, taking the same route as he has to explain the other physical bodies. This account sees the state as possessing a metaphysical status as an individual, and not being merely singular thing, this is to say it possesses a *conatus*. That an individual is both itself and its action has already been covered in chapter two, and it is by this idea that Matheron thinks that a state possesses a singular nature. It follows from its nature as both an active and striving thing that it fills the criteria of an individual. Matheron, and those that follow his analysis, argue we should read the *veluti* distinction literally: the state and the multitude (*multitudo*) literally has one mind.

Contra Matheron's position, the individualist readings argue we should find that Spinoza intends his distinction to be taken metaphorically. In this section, I focus on

¹⁹⁵ Lee Rice coins the terms literalist and metaphoricists, "Individual and Community in Spinoza's Social Psychology," *Spinoza: Issues and Directions*. Ed. Edwin Curley and Pierre-Francois Moreau. (Chicago: Brill, 1986), 271.

Barbone and Rice's accounts of how we ought to read the *veluti* distinction.¹⁹⁶ This position argues that the state does, in many ways, operate *like* an individual. It, undoubtedly, has great power (*potestas*, not *potentia*) to act and affect beings as a singular cause. However the state ultimately would lack the correct right and power to be a proper, ontologically conceived, individual. These thinkers read the *veluti* distinction as metaphorical.

Following this, I turn briefly to French philosopher and historian Pierre-François Moreau. Though important in his own right, here he serves more to highlight the movement between the literalist and metaphorical positions and Balibar's transindividual explication. The last section of this chapter is dedicated to Balibar and his account of the transindividual. Balibar borrows the term transindividual from French philosopher Gilbert Simondon who argues from a shift from ontology to ontogenesis, thus changing the question from what exists to how it came to exist.¹⁹⁷ He maintains that there can no longer be knowledge of individuation in the typical Kantian sense of the term, for we cannot grasp being in becoming without fixing it in the form of concepts, whose spatial and temporal consequences are already predetermined by the faculty of understanding. My aim in this section will not be, however, to cover Simondon's research, but Balibar's own use of the idea of transindividuation. He finds in Simondon's work a way to highlight the ontology of relations that he argues are present in Spinoza's work. For Balibar, transindividuation displaces the question of human essence to practices among

¹⁹⁶ Though there are others who have written on this subject directly, such as Douglas Den Uyl and Robert McShea. Such a position can also be extrapolated from such works that champion Spinoza as the quintessential liberal thinker of the state. Such as Nancy Levene (2004).

¹⁹⁷ See Simondon (1989).

individuals, and these practices constitute the being of the *totality* of individuals. Finally, I argue that Balibar's account is extremely useful to explore Spinoza's theory of individuation as it relates to contemporary politics.

5.1 *The Literalist Position*

For Matheron, the problem of the state-as-individual begins squarely in the *Ethics*, and, as such, he grounds his account in an analysis of the *Ethics*. He does not turn to the political writings until quite late in his own book, *L'individu et communauté chez Spinoza*. As I have covered above, the definition of individuality that Matheron ascribes to Spinoza comes in two parts: 1) "the number and nature of the composing elements," and 2) "the law by which they mutually communicate their movements."¹⁹⁸ When this definition is applied to the political, the first term becomes *societas* or something like an association. Human groups that live in a state are the number that compose and the nature the state-as-individual. Matheron notes that there is *societas* in the state of nature as well, though such a state is anarchic and comprised of loose participation in unique and mutually beneficial circumstances. Even in the state of nature, however, there is a population and a ground or totality. The law of communication when it is extended to the political is roughly equated to the *imperium* or the power/rule of the multitude. The *imperum* is the base of the activity and *power of* the *societas*, or the elements that make up the state-as-individual.¹⁹⁹

Both the *societas* and the *imperium* together form the *civitas*. The citizenry, *civitas*, is the *societas* that gains strength by the laws of the *imperium* or the laws of

¹⁹⁸ Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, 347.

¹⁹⁹ TP 2.17.

communication (which, if we recall, is the maintenance of a mathematical ratio in the body). When a sovereign exists, she consists “primarily in this, that sovereigns are, as it were, the mind of the state,” or the mind of the *imperium*.²⁰⁰ As mentioned above, Spinoza's qualification “as it were” (*veluti*) here is a good formulation from which to read that debate over the nature of the state-as-individual. Matheron explains it thus: the sovereign, from the point of view of extension, is just one part of the social body, but from the point of view of thought, “the soul of the state coincides, if not with that of the Sovereign, then at least with the ideas that compose him, or its members.”²⁰¹ There is no difference between juridical law and physical laws imposed by the sovereign at any level, except at the level of the total face of the universe.²⁰² This is the only level at which the law cannot be broken. Matheron maintains that there are exceptions to juridical law, which is surely more easily broken than physical laws because “external causes prevent all from being able to conform totally to their natures.”²⁰³ However, applies equally to the physical laws And both kind of laws apply to the individual and the state-as-individual. All beings, for Matheron, no matter what they are, are constituted of a “closed totality” that furnishes them with relative autonomy, which is nothing other than their *conatus*. For Matheron, the state, just as much as an individual human, possesses its own *conatus* that drives it to act, and allows it to be acted upon. It is, therefore, the *conatus* that allows us to break both juridical laws (much more easily, of course) and physical laws. For Matheron, the total face of the universe, then, is not an individual because it cannot break

²⁰⁰ TP 4.1.

²⁰¹ Matheron, *Individu et communaute chez Spinoza*, 347.

²⁰² A point developed much more fully by Bove in specific reference to the development of the *conatus*. See Bove (2012).

²⁰³ Matheron, *Individu et communaute chez Spinoza*, 348.

these laws *via a conatus*.

Matheron notes a difference at *TP* 3.2 “it is evident from ... the previous chapter that the right of the state *or* of the sovereign is nothing more than the right of Nature.”²⁰⁴ Drawing this claim forward to *TP* chapter 4.1 he highlights the difference between the *imperium* and the *summa potestas* (the highest authority, or the rule of the sovereign). Here, Matheron uses the important disjunction (*seu, sive, etc.*) to extend the restriction of the use of the *veluti* in 4.1.²⁰⁵ In this way, he can suggest that the body politic be an individual with a soul, which is to say the idea that, when separated from the physical, will continue in the mind of God. While the sovereign does represent the state, as we have seen, it does so only in a limited way. The sovereign’s soul, which is ideational because the ideas that the mind perceives are the ideas of the affections in the body (*l’événement*), becomes the idea of the affections of the *civitas*. Understood correctly this soul can become the adequate expression of the ideas of the state. The sovereign clearly and distinctly understands the confused and muddle inadequate, or imagination, of the *civitas*. Matheron argues that the ideal expression democratic *imperium*, or as a democratic assembly, rather than republican representation.

According to Matheron, the state-as-individual is manifested in three ways: first at the level of institutions, secondly, on the level of individuals, and finally, on the level of other states. Therefore, it is susceptible to death, or losing its unique ratio, on all of these accounts. For a state to function, its institutions must all function reciprocally and adapt to

²⁰⁴ *TP* 3.2, italics mine.

²⁰⁵ Etienne Balibar “*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluit mente ducitur*: Spinoza on the Body Politic,” Trans. Stephen Daniels *Current Continental Theory and Modern Philosophy*, Ed. Stephen Daniel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 76.

one another. It does not matter if these institutions are under a monarchy, an aristocracy, or a democracy; this is a basic set-up for all kinds of states. Like the human body can fall prey to the threat of the passive affects, these institutions are in danger of affects that hinder the correct formation of the state.²⁰⁶ In a similar fashion, individuals are susceptible to economic, ideological, or political moralities that can disrupt or destroy the state's *conatus*.²⁰⁷ Finally, outside states have a very straightforward effect on the state, and can easily damage or destroy the *conatus* of a state. To remain consistent in its ratio the state must form an internal institutional system as well as a system of morality.

Whereas the *TTP* focuses on the social contract, the *TP* largely abandons talk of the contract. Matheron thus emphasizes the *TP* over the *TTP* to argue that the contract is inessential to Spinoza's politics.²⁰⁸ A *multitudo* in the *TTP* is *created* as a result of the natural inter-dependence of humans, whereas in the *TP* the multitude is always-already itself a natural entity. The literalist interpretation sees the laws of nature as having both force and validity in both historical realities and the physical individuals themselves.²⁰⁹ Therefore, history is experienced as a law of nature by the multitude. This analysis favours the naturalism of the *TP* and leaves aside what Matheron sees at the rhetoric of the social compact of the *TTP*.

However, Matheron's reading does tend to leave out the rest of *TP* 3.2, which says: "That is to say, just as each individual in the natural state has as much right as is the power he possesses, the same is true of the body and mind of the entire state."²¹⁰ That this

²⁰⁶ Matheron, *Individu et communaute chez Spinoza*, 352.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 353.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 313.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 289.

²¹⁰ *TP* 3.2.

is true of the body and mind of the whole state makes it difficult to attribute only inadequate representation of the state to the *summa potestas*. It is the general feature of the multitude, by sovereign right, that it incorporates all the powers of the citizens of each and every state. Matheron claims that the multitude must possess a sort of conformism for whom the most basic form of democracy is a “lynching,” and the power of the multitude is precisely that which ensures the safety of conformists and punishes deviants for threatening the mathematical ratio of the state-as-individual.²¹¹

5.2 *The Metaphorical Position*

The metaphorical interpretation denies any metaphysical status to the state. Rather, the state functions as a historical collectivity, and there exists a rational basis of the affectivity of any state. The state can have many of the pieces that make up an individual, in Spinozistic terms, but lack a unifying *conatus*. Understanding the state as something like a quasi-individual, Rice and Robert McShea share the conviction that the metaphysics of the state is nominalist.²¹² This view, both politically and morally, leads to a radical individualism. Rice claims that it is a mistake to see this radical individualism as egoism as Bennett and others have. It is more accurate, Rice writes, to understand this as a methodological individualism. Drawing from later remarks in chapter 6, section 1, of the *TP* it is more plausible, Rice argues, to read Spinoza's use of *veluti* as part of his view that the state is an aggregate of many members operating in a unified manner, all based

²¹¹ Matheron “L’indignation et le *conatus* de l’État spinoziste,” *Spinoza: Puissance et Ontologie* Ed. Myriam Revault D’Allonnes and Hadi Rizk (Paris: Editions Kime, 1993), 159.

²¹² Rice, *Ibid*, 274, see also McShea (1969).

on a principle of self-defense and mutual utility.²¹³

Thus, aggregates of humans are not unified in any ontological sense but are merely historical aggregates with certain institutional tendencies. Rice wants very much to distance himself from the organicist reading of Matheron, which he sees as replacing all politics, and indeed, even the very possibility of politics, with ontology. If we adopt the literalist interpretation, Rice warns, we succumb to “the twin difficulties of totalitarianism and the metaphysical reification of social aggregates.”²¹⁴ On the metaphorical account, what is taking place is not the process of individuation, but the process of harmonization. Drawing on his laws of human psychology, this occurs when a community realizes its reciprocal utility. We fear each other, but the fear of being alone and vulnerable drives humans to come together for the common advantage. This common utility, however, functions in such a manner that each in a harmonized society retains her *potentia*.

According to Douglas Den Uyl, the notion of a super-individual fails on two accounts. First, Den Uyl argues that to advocate a super-individual ignores the omnipresence of nature. Individuals, no matter where they are in the order of nature, are always in the state of nature. On this account, a super-individual would be outside of the politics that are created by human psychology. In contemporary biology and physics the super-individual would be something more akin to an eco-system than a state-individual.²¹⁵ Eco-systems have their own laws, separate from human political laws, and

²¹³ Rice, *Ibid*, 275. Douglas Den Uyl, *Power, State and Freedom: An Interpretation of Spinoza's Political Philosophy*. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1983,)67.

²¹⁴ Rice, “Individual and Community in Spinoza's Social Psychology,” 282.

²¹⁵ Balibar, “*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluit mente ducitur*: Spinoza on the Body Politic,” 79.

presumably from the laws of human psychology.

His second reason is ontological, though his view is not exactly in opposition to Matheron, for he also sees the individual as a set of relations. However, what the metaphorists set out to demonstrate is that these singular humans lack a group *conatus* to take them from the singular thing expressed in E2d7 to an individual in the “physical interlude.” Barbone uses the example of a flash flood. Water as well as various debris, such as plants, rocks and even animals make up a flood. Together all these things have one effect, and is properly called a *rem singularem*, or singular thing.²¹⁶ The flash flood has no power in itself and no *conatus*. In this way, the *summa potestas* is not singular, and even if there is a monarch or an aristocracy, instead of democracy, the correct way to understand the ordering is as a harmonious (if the state is functioning well) set of relations. Harmony, then, is the mark of the state and not individuation.

Rice returns to the example of the worm in blood to make this clear. The worm in the blood shows us that the worm is most certainly an individual, and it is one because the activity at the lower levels of individuality can be attributed to the laws of higher organisms, or the “hierarchy of laws which are related deductively so as to produce reduction schemata for the objects which fall under these laws.”²¹⁷ Human individuals are subject to affective activity at the ontological level, but Rice denies that there are any such laws at the political level. In the *TTP* Spinoza writes that these sorts of laws, that is historical or political, “depend on the will of men.”²¹⁸ The worm in the blood demonstrates the inter-dependence of causal laws. There exists a stratum of natural law

²¹⁶ Barbone, “What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza?” 90. Den Uyl uses a similar example of a boulder.

²¹⁷ Rice, “Individual and Community in Spinoza's Social Psychology,” 277.

²¹⁸ *TTP* 4.2-3.

that binds the worm, the blood, and the individual at each stratum. According to Rice, however, the state has no such law. This is because the state is created from a set of individuals with no diversity, and therefore has no integration.²¹⁹ The worm in the blood, according to the metaphorists, should be read as a political or social metaphor, not an ontological statement about the nature of individuals. The closest thing that can satisfy the requirements of a super-individual is the total face of the universe, or, perhaps, something like an ecosystem.²²⁰

The case that Barbone, Den Uyl, and Rice make is compelling and has intuitive appeal. However, in their account of the *veluti* distinction, the concept of a state seems to oscillate between two kinds of metaphor.²²¹ The first extends the term individual. The second treats the metaphor to represent the pseudo, or quasi, individuals. The oscillation is unintentional and confuses the problem at the level of the original text and interpretation. On the former reading, there is a criticism of other readers of Spinoza, but those are separate from the metaphoric language Barbone and Rice wish to find in the letter of the text. In the case of the latter, Balibar argues that the actual expression in the text (*una veluti mente duci*) reverses the function of the distinction. Balibar claims that this reversal demonstrates not only that *veluti* resists Rice and Barbone's readings, but that it also resists Matheron's organism. In other words, Balibar claims that they all have misunderstood Spinoza. Balibar charges Rice and Barbone's position as suffering from another conflation, namely that Spinoza's nominalism converges with his politics to offer

²¹⁹ Despite E3p18, both Barbone and Rice argue that that should be read metaphorically as well. There is not possible way for two things, first of all, to possess the same nature. And the consequence of this is that there is no way for things to unite homogeneously, only heterogeneously.

²²⁰ Rice also suggests planetary systems satisfy this category.

²²¹ Balibar, "*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluit mente ducitur*: Spinoza on the Body Politic," 79.

a liberalism or libertarianism. In doing so, Balibar claims that Rice and Barbone presuppose Spinoza to be arguing that only particular individuals exist, and no universal entities such as a state exist in any real way. That is to say, the state operates with an illusion of “thingness,” when, in fact, it is only its laws. This methodological individualism is seen to echo the social-political individualism from the *Ethics* to the political writings because thinkers such as Rice and Barbone are suspicious of any unity superseding the classical liberal individual.

5.3 *The Transindividual Position*

Before I continue any further with this analysis it is incumbent upon on me to mention Moreau, though I will not investigate his work in great detail here. Balibar casts Spinoza's interpreters mentioned above, Matheron, Barbone, and Rice, as dogmatic thinkers. They are such because they all insist that there is *one* correct understanding of Spinoza's thought that they hope to explicate. However, Balibar casts Moreau as a “critical” interpreter in that he attempts to create an account that confronts all these readings.²²² For my purposes here it is helpful to understand how Balibar builds off of Moreau's critical interpretation to offer his own quasi-literalist interpretation.

For Moreau, the question becomes a larger contextual one: how are we to understand Spinoza's theory of affects within a theory of history? Every state is made up of historically situated mores and values, which Spinoza calls *ingenium* and Moreau *complexion*.²²³ This *complexion* forms a historically situated form of nature, and

²²² Balibar, “*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluit mente ducitur*: Spinoza on the Body Politic,” 75-76.

²²³ TTP 5, 4-9, 12, 18.

moreover, it is the natural limit of the power of particular collective identities. It is the peoples of a state that form the natural basis that adheres to the institutional limits of that power. Therefore, while a people create institutions, the institutions themselves also shape the people as a collectivity and are themselves the limit of the power of the people. As such, the state can be understood as an individual in a certain way. Moreau notes that the literalistic interpretation derives from a key remark made in chapter 5 of the TP: “men are not born citizen but must be made so.”²²⁴ The metaphoricist reading, on the other hand, depends on chapter 3 of *TTP*: “nature does not create peoples, but individuals.”²²⁵ Moreau argues that what is most crucial is that these do not address the same point. As seen above, the literalist position relies on an ontological claim, whereas the metaphorist position seeks to understand the function of institutions themselves.

Balibar classifies Matheron, as well Rice's, account of the issues of the state-as-individual as dogmatic: “they all propose – although in opposing senses – that the solution lies immediately in a correct understanding of Spinozism that they aim to explicate.”²²⁶ Balibar takes Moreau to offer a critical perspective on the debate around the state-as-individual in that he, in some ways, seeks to answer the questions that the confrontation between the two camps. Balibar himself, on the one hand, emphasizes the communication and interactivity between bodies, and on the other, focuses on the political. In doing so, Balibar takes from both the literalists and the metaphoricists, and terms his own reading a “literalistic.”

In borrowing from the literalism of Rice, Balibar proposes that we need to look at

²²⁴ *TP* 5.2.

²²⁵ *TTP* 3.17.

²²⁶ Balibar “*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluit mente ducitur*: Spinoza on the Body Politic,” 79.

every instance of the expression *una veluti mente ducitur* (as if by one mind), no matter to what it is referring. In seeing that it does, in fact, apply to different things is part of the problem of interpretation of what Spinoza may have meant about the state-as-individual. Secondly, he argues, we should take into account all social, political and institutional *corpus* (body) references outside of this one expression. Doing so, Balibar argues, demonstrates how other expressions, such as *corpus imperii* (body of government), *mens civitatis* (mind of the state), and so on are also fraught and complicated by Spinoza's use of *veluti* before these phrases. That the history of the "body politic" comprises legal, religious, and philosophical ideas is not, for Spinoza, theoretical but rather ideological. Since, for Balibar, it has this ideological dimension, starting from corporeal individuation is a dubious basis for a theory of individuation. Third, he suggests that we compare the occurrences of the expression *una veluti mente ducitur* with such expressions as *ratione duci* (guided by reason), *ex ratione ductu* (the reason of leadership), and so forth.²²⁷ What Balibar argues is that this distinction demonstrates that there is no univocal situation that *una veluti mente ducitur* covers, or refers to. *Una veluti mente ducitur* is, in fact, an alternation between affective mechanisms and the aim of rational utility. Finally, we need to juxtapose *una veluti mente ducitur* with what Balibar calls its "manifest antithesis" in the *TP*, *ex suo ingenio vivere* (from his own life or from his own self) that each citizen possesses.²²⁸ There is both a formal and substantial opposition in this contradiction. The formal opposition lies in the unity of the state and the "natural" independence of a people.

²²⁷ Balibar, "Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluit mente ducitur: Spinoza on the Body Politic," 89-93. All translations from the Latin in Balibar's text are my own.

²²⁸ Ibid, 89. This is, of course, another way of discussing the dual register of individuation and individuality.

The substantial opposition “at the heart of the *multitudo*” that lies between the right of the individual based on *ex suo ingenio vivere* is self-destructive and, therefore, for Spinoza, impossible. On the other hand, the right that combines the *ex suo ingenio vivere* with communal right (and therefore power) “seems to deprive it of all but a virtual content.”²²⁹

Balibar's take on literalism departs from Rice and Barbone, as it is in the letter of the texts that Balibar wants to find an answer to the question of this curious expression, unlike Matheron who in many ways departs from the letter of the texts to extrapolate a perceived meaning. F Balibar suggests we investigate the problem he draws the conclusion that the “collective *mens* [mind] is for Spinoza essentially never anything other than the practical realization of an *animorum unio* [unity of minds]; in other word, a reconciliation or combination of *ingenia* [character, specifically that which emotional or passionate reminder which is left out of *mens*].”²³⁰

What can we make of Balibar's method? Balibar draws on Moreau's method of critical interpretation of the text. To understand the reconciliation of the *animorum unio* and the *ingenia* one must, by necessity, take up “the passionate dynamic of a mob,” or the affective nature of the citizens, with the “rational collective deliberation in the setting of stable institutions,” or the rational power of the state.²³¹ In fact, this is why Spinoza advocates large-scale collective deliberation. It is his contention that the more voices that are entered into this space, the more likely it is that a conflict will be overcome.²³² Balibar labels this process as “transindividual.” I may seem to go too far into the details on

²²⁹ Balibar, “*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluit mente ducitur*: Spinoza on the Body Politic,” 89.

²³⁰ Ibid, 90.

²³¹ Ibid, 90.

²³² TTP 16.9, TP 9.14.

Spinoza's political process here, but I do so to highlight an example of normative advice on how states should run given from the metaphysical position of the transindividual. What I demonstrate here is that the collectivist interpretation, particularly as fleshed out by Balibar, can give us normative politics that, in some sense, privilege the individual human via their collective engagement in political organization. This might seem to suggest, to the detriment of my thesis, that this makes the distinction between literal and metaphorical understanding moot. If we can carry on our affairs, make normative judgments and organize out state in such a way to minimize conflict, what does it even matter if the state is an individual or not? I must confess I cannot give a satisfying answer at this point, other than to say that, for Spinoza, believed that the proper understanding of things through the intellectual love of God was the true path to freedom and blessedness. This is, of course, the subject of part five of the *Ethics*. This is not a path that all can achieve, and, therefore, having the capacity for adequate reason can allow for a normative platform without having reached the love of God.

Balibar, and many Marxist readers of Spinoza want to minimize the elitism that creeps in with this idea, in favour of the celebration of collectivity. This may be an oversight of these interpretations, but one I am bracketing here. In his lecture, "Spinoza from Individuality to Transindividuality," Balibar argues that Spinoza's philosophy should be thought of as a relational ontology, or a "general theory of Communication."²³³ Individuals, in this relational ontology, are not given, but are constructed and are *a posteriori* to processes of individuation at multiple levels. Moreover, "their construction as well as their activity always involves a previous, originary connection with other

²³³ Balibar, "Spinoza from Individuality to Transindividuality," 6.

individuals ... a reciprocity of interconnected of interdependent processes of individuation and individualization.”²³⁴ E1p28 and 29 tells us that:

Every individual thing ... cannot exist or be determined to act unless it be determined to exist and to act by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and this cause again cannot exist or be determined to act unless it be determined to exist and to act by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence, and so ad infinitum.²³⁵

Thus, “nothing in nature is contingent,” and it is through these propositions that we should understand this communication. This is to say, the relationship between individuals is always *a posteriori* relationship. Moreover, this interaction is not derived, but an “elementary pattern of every causal action,”²³⁶ that always takes place between individuals. Therefore, Balibar sees Spinoza's theory as both anti-individualistic as well as anti-holistic. Balibar borrows the term, and much of its theoretical implementation, transindividual from French philosopher Gilbert Simondon and his book *L'individuation psychique et collective*. Simondon, for his part, denies that his thought is Spinozistic, and, in fact, rejects Spinoza's philosophy as “a negation of individual reality.”²³⁷

The transindividual in Balibar's writing takes as its object the “way in which the more or less organized multitude 'perceives' itself ... In perceiving itself, it thus 'organizes' itself.”²³⁸ This process of transindividuality is not ideal or spiritual, but “reflects and articulates the power of bodies that comprise the multitude and its singularity, its particular ‘way of life’.”²³⁹ E4p18s demonstrates that the definition of the collective *mens*, or mind, is really a *quasi-mens*. This may well sound paradoxical. However,

²³⁴ Balibar, “Spinoza from Individuality to Transindividuality,” 7.

²³⁵ E1p28-29.

²³⁶ Balibar, “Spinoza from Individuality to Transindividuality,” 10.

²³⁷ Ibid, 8.

²³⁸ Balibar, “*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluit mente ducitur*: Spinoza on the Body Politic,” 91.

²³⁹ Ibid.

bearing in mind his simultaneous claims for anti-individualism and anti-holisticism we can make sense of Balibar's claim. The “unity-of-action” of the *mens* can only be thought of “as-if” it is whole, as a quasi-*mens*. Mind, for Spinoza, is nothing other than the organized totality of its ideas, and as such, Balibar argues, the only way to speak of some unified action of a collective mind is with this distinction. We may say it operates as a mind, or as a mind, or even the action of a collective idea is, as it were, a mind. This is the case, Balibar argues, because individuals are unified in their tendency to action. Being unified in action, they can only be thought of in the “as-if” because an individual is nothing other than the “ensemble of ‘its’ ideas.”²⁴⁰ The proper capacity of the quasi-*mens* is to guide itself in a univocal way that gives rise to its internal organization. Without said organization, Balibar argues, it could not exist.

Balibar is right to address this, and it brings us back to thinking about the body. If this is all the case for the quasi-*mens*, what do we say of the body? If we follow Matheron, we need only to understand the physicalist body of the individual. It is clear in Balibar's account we can leave behind the physics of the *Ethics*. However, it is important to remember that the attributes, mind and body, are different expressions of the same thing. As such, we can no more think the quasi-*mens* as prior to the body politic as we can think the body politic as prior to the quasi-*mens*. As such, the rhetoric of the body politic here is unhelpful. This term “prescribes nothing by itself,” or perhaps only the ambition of the state to incorporate the multitude to the life of the state.²⁴¹ As a consequence, we could say that without a minimum communal thought and incorporation into the state

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

there could be no state.

It is important to return to Matheron's remarks on Spinozistic democracy: "the fundamental form of democracy is lynching." The maximum communal thought and incorporation is a conformism that would be punishable by death, or exclusion, of those who do not conform. This is a very real worry about the outcome of Spinozist politics. Spinoza briefly treats this problem in his discussion of the monarchy in the *TP*. The state's attempt to create ultimate conformity can often generate extreme systemic violence, deep kinds of hatred, and state control of what kind life is valuable. The state and the multitude both attempt to create conformism under many guises, and a consequence of this is that such a state, that is a state that violently represses or engenders deep systemic injustice is fundamentally unstable. Further, Balibar argues that there is no end of communal thought, because ideas, thought, and mind are developing endlessly.²⁴²

What, then, *is* the state for Balibar? It is something that fluctuates between the *multitudo*, the *imperium*, and the *summae potestas*. Balibar maintains that they are aspects of the same thing, possessing the same *conatus* amongst them all. This is to say that we should refrain from attempting to essentialize the state. On Balibar's account, it is not possible to localize where the individuality of the state/multitude/sovereign power lies precisely because this was not something Spinoza was attempting to do. The fluctuation among these different facets may be expressed as an ethical or political effort, or something more like a duty. The notion of the political subject is, therefore, an ambiguous one.

Balibar's whole project of interpretation of the question of the state-as-individual

²⁴² See E5p5-10.

consists in more general queries about the nature of *mens* in Spinoza's work. However, we can say that, on Balibar's account, the quasi-*mens* is “the mental identity of a composed transindividual.”²⁴³ Unlike Matheron, who focuses on the physical and Rice who focuses on the nominal, Balibar believes the answer to this problematic lies in the consideration of *mens* and ideas, which is simultaneously a philological and historical project.²⁴⁴ As Spinoza's thought matures he tends towards an “analysis of the passions based on the logic of idea-complexes.” This philological and historical project, then, must look towards the *ingenia* and all that it emphasizes as that which is beyond the *mens*, or not captured by the word. Affects are, therefore, “radically intellectualized” as we try to understand what they are and what they do beyond the *mens*.²⁴⁵ It is not entirely clear, for Balibar, how the radically intellectualized passions are differentiated from adequate and inadequate ideas. One can wonder if the radically intellectualized passion, which is inadequate, is meant to be more than an imaginative fiction. The most likely case is that this should be thought of in Althusserian terms, the imagined collective fictions that a united *mens* engages in are, for example, the religious powers that Spinoza discusses at length in the *TTP*. These passionnal objects of the *ingenium* are practical. In many ways, then, the way to understand Spinoza's remark at *TTP* chapter 17 is that nature does not create states, but *ingenium*, people, or nations do this. The literalists find that this demonstrates that the state cannot be thought of as an individual because it is merely the aggregate of the *ingenium*, however, the relationship between the *ingenium*, the *imperium* and the *summae potestas* begins to capture the transindividual concept. What the

²⁴³ Ibid, 93.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 94.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

ingenium, and “smaller” individual humans are is the balance in the totalization and separation of the transindividual. It is within the *ingenium* that we can account for the movement of mental and physical bodies, or of attraction and repulsion. But all three function together to give us the particulars, their location or their affections, and the totality of their power.

It is beyond doubt that there exists in Spinoza's ontology a theory of individuation and individuality. This theory allows Spinoza to express the effects of substance, and to have a language to speak of the distinction of parts and the whole. Balibar is quite correct to maintain that it is very wrong headed and a fundamental mistake to think of this process of individuation strictly in terms of the human body and the human soul as Spinoza is quite explicit that there are both modes and individuals that are not humans. It is simple things, or *res simplicis*, which are expressed as having a cause and effect. In the preceding chapters, I have often used the human individual as a point of reference, but I agree with Balibar that it is a mistake to think of the process of individuation as merely a human experience, though, as Sharp notes, it is the only position a human creature could realistically be expected to be writing from. It is an epistemological impossibility for me to know what reality is like for a frog, a mushroom or a nuclear reactor. However, the “anthropomorphic illusion” is nothing other than an imagined way that humans often approach reality.²⁴⁶ Balibar argues that the political project is, therefore, the ultimate critique of this anthropomorphic illusion. This is because, perhaps paradoxically, it demands that the human be able to think outside the human and that we should avoid the over-determination by the *imperium*, the multitude, and the *summae potesta*. This is to

²⁴⁶ Balibar, “*Potentia multitudinis, quae una veluit mente ducitur*: Spinoza on the Body Politic,” 95.

say, by avoiding these over determinations and radically re-thinking how and what it means to be individuated, Balibar adopt a new model of thought.²⁴⁷ The web of individuation that results can be applied equally to human life as to non-human life. The whole does not determine the parts, but the parts, through their mutuality, determine each other. For Balibar, the transindividual is always already “embedded in the life of human individuality” and our passionate natures.²⁴⁸ The political project gives humans the only way to think, perhaps we might say, into different strata. Balibar argues that this is ultimately what the Spinozist sage is.

In this chapter, I have turned to current writings on the question of the state-as-individual. Specifically, I have looked at the thought of Matheron, Barbone, Den Uyl, Rice, Moreau, and Balibar. First, I have examined the Matheron’s organicism. Problematically, Matheron takes an almost exclusively physical route to explaining the nature of the state's individuality, which does not properly address the place of both the *TP* and the *TTP* in Spinoza's corpus. The metaphoricists see the problem as, in many ways, an inflation of a supposed communitarianism. Spinoza's liberalism and nominalism deny any ontological state-as-individual, though the *imperium*, the *multitudo* and the *summae potestas* do operate in a potentially “quasi-individual” manner. Ultimately, however, their account conflates the use of metaphor in Spinoza's work with the metaphor at play in the work of Matheron and other literalists. Furthermore, they also

²⁴⁷ Balibar's anti-anthropocentrism shares a great deal in common with contemporary theories of anti-humanism and post-humanism. For more on those fields of thought see Rosi Braidotti (2006, 2013), Donna Haraway (1989), Katherine Hayles (1999), Neil Badmington (2003), Cary Wolfe (2010), and Claire Colebrook (2012). It is, of course, more fundamentally indebted to Marxist and Althusserian influences. It is, on this account, a superstition, or a product of our imagination, to see the unity of human and civil life as held together by a state, in reality, it is the human and civil life that holds together a state.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

problematically conflate Spinoza's supposed ontological nominalism and his political liberalism. In direct opposition to the model that Balibar introduces, which argues that the collective, through its determined process of mutuality, creates and moves the whole, the literalists are accused of readings Spinoza to be delivering a theory whereby the individual agents, in their autonomy, are not only more important than the whole, but that the whole itself is a sort of illusion. Moreau offers a critical interpretation that seeks to find a more nuanced solution to this question counter to the dogmatism of the previous commentators. Moreau describes the state as an individual characterized by association, integration, and adhesion. However, Moreau's arguments also leave some questions. His speaks obliquely of the *ingenium*, while at the same time utilizing it as a potential category to think one's way out of the problems of the previous account, and, moreover, he focuses too closely on the individuality of one individual within history and thereby ignores the difference of individuality and individuation. Finally, he privileges passions more than reason. While Balibar spends great energy explicating the passionate, it is always clear that the rational is equally important. Balibar's account relies on the notion of the transindividual to understand the many vibrant and constant ways in which individuality and individuation take place within the tripartite of the *imperium*, the *multitudo*, and the *summae potestas*.

However, we are still left wondering what the actual implications for the political are. If it is the one project that can liberate humans from the anthropomorphic view that holds our imagination captive and allows political fictions to hold on with great might and bio-political force, how can we begin to participate in this? This is a huge question for Spinoza studies, and an important one for all manner of political thinkers. It would take a

whole second thesis to address this question, but let me draw to a conclusion by gesturing towards some potential ideas and actions for Spinozist politics.

Conclusion

Some Concluding Remarks on the Project of Spinozist Politics

This thesis has been an investigation into Spinoza's theory of individuation. I have argued to understand Spinoza's theory of individuation as a collective process, which helps us to uncover Spinoza's deeply inter-active social theory. To do so, we must begin with his substance monism. Departing from here, we find, first of all, the underlying commonality of all things. In doing so, we can reject the readings of Spinoza's ontology as atomistic. Doing so not only dismisses a reading of Spinoza as the founder of liberal individualism, but it also dispels the readings of Spinoza as an egoist, since there never is a unified and lonely ego to be empowered the individual, for Spinoza, is always assembling in webs of relations in which its historical and political milieu place it. His differentiation of individuals is, undoubtedly, the result of arrangements of the simple bodies, but these simple bodies are not themselves atomistic. Moreover, the construction of individuals always necessitates a multiplicity of different individuals at every level, and these levels each possess its own *conatus*, or power to persevere in its essence.

However that is not the whole picture. Owing to Spinoza's mind-body parallelism, we must also account for the individuation of the mind. I have argued, in chapter three, that in turning to the mind it becomes apparent that there are two different notions taking place in the *Ethics* on the subject of individuality: individuals and individuation. I have argued that an individual, at whatever strata, proceeds from inadequate ideas, or the imagination, to the common notions or the intellectual love of God: she realizes her fundamental participation in substance monism. As such, the more adequate ideas an

individual has, the less she sees herself as individuated, or separate.

The effect of this realization has notable implications for Spinoza's ethics and his politics. In the final section of this thesis, I have highlighted three contemporary views on the question of the state-as-individual. There is a great deal of scholarship on Spinoza's ethical theory as it relates to human beings. That there is this research makes sense, as the *Ethics* is a text for humans about humans. The ethical implications of the theory of individuation lie within that text, no matter how many disagreements exist in the literature regarding the exact nature of those ethics. However, I am more interested in the metaphysical implications of Spinoza's theory of individuation as it relates to his political writings.

His writings are not abundantly clear on what “a people guided as if by one mind” means. I have attempted to show three possible readings of this qualification. Ultimately, I argue that Balibar's reading of this distinction is the most plausible. The transindividual is not a straightforward understanding of the “physical interlude,” nor are its implications for individuality, but it is, I argue, promising.

Before closing, I would like to pose some further questions about the nature of “politics in a world without transcendence.”²⁴⁹ Where can a politic deduced from the metaphysics of individuation lead us? What, if anything, can it offer? How far can Balibar's reading of nature as history take us? Is Matheron correct to suspect that the democracy of the multitude is a lynching? Moreover, if, for Spinoza, democracy is the best arrangement for the power of the masses, how does the multitude attempt to rule

²⁴⁹ Warren Montag, “Spinoza: Politics in a World without Transcendence,” *Rethinking Marxism*. (2009), 89-103.

itself with the twin preoccupations of perseverance and fear? How does the multitude struggle against itself and discover the antidote to such fear? In other words, is a political community that does not fluctuate between love and hate, or our subjugation to our passions, possible or even desirable?²⁵⁰

As we see, moving beyond the anthropomorphisms that Balibar warns us of only begins to scratch the surface of a much larger set of questions. If we endorse Balibar, we must remain with these questions to envision a transindividual politics. Since, for Spinoza, there is no simple notion of teleology, the question is not what will *the* future-politic look like, but how does a state that is continually engaging in both honest and dishonest processes of balancing individuality and individuation hope to promote the most ethical state. Undoubtedly, Balibar and all the other commentators on Spinoza's politics have imported their preferred politics into Spinoza's praxis. Balibar, at times, seems to forget that the *conatus* of individuals, especially masses, is variable, both active and passive, and without a particular path. At times, Balibar's account, I argue, is much more utopian than Spinoza himself would ever have endorsed. Balibar's own political commitments show through in his adoption of Spinozism.

There is an undeniable positivity in Spinoza's thought; however, it is foolish as well as dangerous to presume that a Spinozistic politics would be merely an active and on-going democratic process. These are idealized manifestations that we may have, and while they are fine, we cannot ignore that the quasi-*mens* is also a potentially dark, violent, and exclusive notion. Even if we are all interconnected through the mechanisms of relational communication as modes of God, the outcome is not always utopic. As I

²⁵⁰ E4p37.

mentioned above, our very relationality posits the transindividual and constitutes the danger of the transindividual. In the theory of immanence, there is no outside, and we should not romanticize this in Marxist terms. However, it is one thing to see the metaphysics as correct, and quite another to agree that the politics are ethical.

Take, for example, Spinoza's treatment of women in the *TP*. Spinoza's position is such that he essentializes women as irrational, despite his ontological commitments that should lead him to deny such a human essence. We may go so far as to say that he denies women a *conatus*. As such, we are better to think of them as *res singulares*, as floods or boulders, mentioned in chapter two. Moreover, he excludes foreigners (*peregrinos*), servants (*servos*), children, and criminals from the state.²⁵¹ If a majority of the people in the state is disassociated from power, or are only *res singulares*, not only can these people not change in the way any individual with a *conatus* can, but also it fundamentally changes how we are to behave ethically towards them.

It is tempting to return to Balibar here and note that this example is anthropomorphic, and therein is the problem. However, as Warren Montag notes, the theory of affects drags us back in regardless.²⁵² Our imitation of affects, our shared mechanism of communication, has us spread affects "like a contagion."²⁵³ Most often these affects are inadequate, the result of imagination. In a letter to Pieter Balling after the death of his son, Spinoza writes, "the effects of the imagination ... which have their origin in the constitution of the mind can have a confused presentiment of what the future is. So

²⁵¹ TP 11/4.

²⁵² Warren Montag, "Who is afraid of the Multitude? Between the Individual and the State," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*. (2005), 668.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, 669.

it can imagine it as firmly and vividly as if such a thing were present to it.”²⁵⁴ It may be that those things we fear, or hate, can come to pass.

Despite his own writings on the subject, there is little metaphysical reason in Spinoza's system to deny women, foreigners, servants, children, and criminals their individuality and maintain that they have a certain deficient essence. As such, we should see the easy danger of the transindividual. The fear and hatred of these people and others can spread like a contagion. We have countless examples of this throughout history.

While Spinoza begins with God, his God is not an immaterial separate creator, and more importantly, his God denies the possibility of any ontological hierarchy: “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.”²⁵⁵ Everything that exists is part of God, and there is no longer room for dualism. Spinoza's God is not an Aristotelian *ousia*, for nature is pure actuality, a self-caused and immanent cause.²⁵⁶ The totality of nature is ambivalent, and there is no simple concept of teleology towards which it tends; as such, these contagions of affects are that which we always need to be cognizant of. If this is the case, there is still much work to be done on Spinoza's politics. This thesis takes these steps by analyzing contemporary readings of his work, while implicitly arguing that we must still engage with Spinoza's thinking has. Spinoza is, as I mentioned above, a thinker of perspective. His philosophy affirms each individual's precarious place in the world and enshrines each person with a desire to uphold themselves, and further, endows them with as much power as they can amass by natural right. Simultaneously we grow stronger by joining together with others who share our natures.

²⁵⁴ Letter 17.

²⁵⁵ E1p15.

²⁵⁶ E1p18.

Because this is a philosophy of becoming, we are always in new arrangements of power with one another, and the more we can form adequate ideas about these arrangements, the closer we come to intellectual love of God. There is nothing but existing things in webs of relation that can be constructive and destructive to our individual and collective power to persevere. The world politics that emerges from these metaphysics is anything but mundane and offers important lessons for those thinking the most important political questions today.

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