

# **In Nature and In God: Spinoza and Blessedness**

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I dedicate this work in memory of Spinoza himself, to he who has produced a work that will haunt me for the rest of my waking life – though may the eternal life of the Mind save me from further torment.

## **Abstract**

*This paper considers the Ethics of Baruch Spinoza through three of the most important concepts presented in the work: essence, knowledge, and blessedness. By thoroughly exploring and re-examining these concepts and the role they play in Spinoza's ethical project, it becomes clear that it is knowledge of the essences of singular things that is key to the life of blessedness. This exploration is approached from a perspective that intends to unify the metaphysical, epistemological and moral projects presented in the Ethics. This paper will argue that knowledge of the essences of singular things involves the relations of finite modes, both insofar as they actually exist and insofar as they exist sub specie aeternitatis. Therefore, it is not merely reason and adequate knowledge of eternity that lead the philosopher to blessedness, but knowledge of finite modes and their relations to one another that constitutes knowledge of the third kind, viz. scientia intuitiva, the highest good of the Mind.*

## Introduction

Baruch de Spinoza's *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata, et in quinque Partes Distincta* is a highly complex and beautiful work that moves from a revolutionary metaphysical picture of the world and its closely corresponding epistemology to a meticulous and novel psychology that results in a radical new way to conceive of philosophical blessedness and the highest good of the Mind.<sup>1</sup> The intricacy of the work is such that no part can be adequately understood by itself alone, but indeed, the history of Spinoza scholarship has revealed a propensity for ignoring, dismissing, or belittling the project and content of the concluding Part of the *Ethics*. The reading given here avoids compartmentalizing ideas but rather considers them as they are expressed in the work as a whole. I will explore three of the most important concepts Spinoza confronts in the *Ethics* – essence, knowledge, and blessedness - and consequently explore how one can use the relation and connection of these concepts in order to uncover the greater ethical project. This work, presented unlike any other truly ethical endeavor, i.e. in the rigorous geometrical method,<sup>2</sup> is famously, curiously elusive even to the dedicated rational philosopher. In order to give a faithful and useful account of this novel ethics, this paper considers the metaphysical and epistemic foundation of Spinozistic morality. Ultimately, I aim to show that the *Ethics* provides a route to achieving blessedness which relies on knowledge of relations of modes, grounded in knowledge of modes *sub specie aeternitatis*. The consequence of

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from the *Ethics* are from *The Collected Works of Spinoza Volume I*, edited and translated by Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). References to Letters 1- 16 are also from this translation. All other letters are as translated by Samuel Shirley in *The Letters* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995). All references are as follows: the Part is listed first in roman numerals, P indicates a proposition, A, an axiom, D, a definition, C, a corollary, S, a scholium, L, a lemma. After a proposition, D refers to a demonstration. For example, Part Two, proposition 40, scholium 2 is referenced as IIP40S2. In the Curley translation of Spinoza, when a reference is listed without a roman numeral indicating the Part, it is understood to reference the proposition in the same part as the excerpt itself.

<sup>2</sup> For interesting discussions of the reasoning behind Spinoza's use of the rigorous geometrical method, see Curley 1988, Deleuze 1997, and Steenbakkens 2009.

this adequate knowledge is the virtuous life: the true philosopher is not solely a man of contemplation, but is concurrently and necessarily a man of virtuous actions.

I begin the first section with an extended discussion of the concept of *essentia*, which I distinguish in three respects: formal essence; actual essence; and what I call ‘essence in the complete sense,’ which I argue to be the unified actual and formal essences. I move on to discuss the relation of the concepts *essentia* and *natura* in certain, relevant instances and conclude that attending simultaneously to a thing’s formal and actual essence is necessary for any finite intellect to obtain adequate knowledge of the essence of any singular thing, and therefore necessary for knowledge of the third kind.

I move on in the second section to consider Spinoza’s epistemology, considering first certain crucial technical terms and then discussing each of the three kinds of knowledge he identifies and their objects. This discussion relies heavily on the reading of essences presented in the first section. I conclude the second section with knowledge of the third kind, i.e., knowledge of essences of singular things, and lay the basic groundwork for the final section. The last section of this paper brings together the complex concepts confronted in the earlier sections to explain how one might understand the striving of finite modes and the highest good of the Mind; I consider how it is possible to achieve blessedness and how this seemingly intellectual endeavor has crucial and necessary consequences for how we ought to live. On my interpretation, this is the project of the *Ethics* – showing a philosophical readership one route to salvation – and it cannot be adequately understood without tying together the metaphysics, epistemology, and the account of morality that then emerges in the work; this is the reasoning behind my focus on three concepts, *essentia*, knowledge, and *beatitudo*, that are pervasive in the *Ethics* as a whole. Ultimately, I understand the *Ethics* as a work with practical consequences, a work that gives us a

method for living a life of virtue: I conclude that blessedness *or* salvation is not the result of a life of contemplation alone, but follows equally from the right principles of living.

**“Rubbish that causes others to write rubbish”**

There have been, as far as I can tell, two dominant strands in Spinoza scholarship when confronting Part V of the *Ethics*.<sup>3</sup> The first, which consists of those who I am inclined to believe are relatively unsympathetic to Spinoza’s project, tend to read the *Ethics* and through the course of Parts I-IV develop a certain metaphysical and epistemological picture. When they reach Part V, it seems so radically unrelated or even opposed to their by-then-established reading, that they dismiss or ignore it, claim it a huge blemish on the *Ethics*, or declare it impossible to place within the project of the preceding four Parts. The second major trend, followed by those I am inclined to believe harbor a desire to ‘save Spinoza from himself’ by giving a coherent interpretation of Part V, tends to follow the same initial footsteps as their dismissive peers, but instead of scorning Part V, they attempt to explain it largely independent of their reading of the rest of the *Ethics*. Though some do give an account of Part V in the context of the rest of the *Ethics*, it frequently results in conclusions, assumptions or explanations that make most red-blooded philosophers – in particular, Spinozists – cringe. Philosophers such as Jonathon Bennett take the first route, declaring Part V and the doctrine of the eternity of the Mind “rubbish that causes others to write rubbish” (Bennett, 1984, pg. 357, 372). Others, such as Wallace Matson, attempt to give a coherent account and though making a valiant effort, in the meantime end up twisting the metaphysics into something highly problematic or deeply unspinozistic. Being far less qualified than the scholars who have grappled with this before me, I make no presumption to succeed where they have found only more confusion and conflict, nor can I even adequately

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<sup>3</sup> For a thorough breakdown of reactions to Part V’s claims regarding the eternity of the mind, see Steven Parchment, “The Mind’s Eternity in Spinoza’s *Ethics*” in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy*. Vol 38, No 3: July 2000 (349-382).

acknowledge the full impact their influence has had on my own work. However, I do not aspire to write rubbish, nor do I intend to mutate a truly novel and inspiring metaphysics. What I attempt to do in this paper is present some of the most important concepts permeating the whole of the *Ethics* in a coherent and faithful way. I will argue that though my reading is far from being ‘the reading,’ it is one way to understand the *Ethics* and its project. This paper attempts to avoid either dismissing the capstone of the *Ethics* or imposing a reading of the first four Parts on the fifth Part instead of considering the work as a whole.

In attempting to remain as faithful as possible to Spinoza’s project, there is a degree of complexity and obscurity that cannot be avoided. Spinoza himself avoids giving strict definitions or a surplus of examples - indeed, he gives remarkably few - and for that reason I avoid giving technical terms a rigorous and concrete definition. One glaring exception to this will be my attempt to give an accurate picture of Spinozistic essences. This, however, should not be seen as an attempt to ascribe a rigid definition to *essentia*, but rather as one way of making ontological and epistemological sense of the term. A large part of understanding Spinozistic ethics, as this account understands it, is the act of contemplation and the acquiring or achieving knowledge rather than receiving it. Moreover, many of the terms Spinoza employs throughout the course of the *Ethics* – *essentia* being one of the best examples of this – are, though grounded in their historical use and context, notably novel and original conceptions. With that said, let us begin by contemplating together.

### **On *Essentia***

Let us momentarily pause our concerns of achieving virtue and concentrate on the Spinozistic conception of essence. It is crucial to remember that any faithful reading of Spinoza’s epistemology, psychology or ethics must be grounded in his complex metaphysics; and indeed it

is a metaphysical discussion of essences that follows. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that his presentation of essence (*essentia*) and nature (*natura*) - two concepts with a crucial relation to one another - differs nontrivially from previous accounts of their ontological status and role in the pursuit of virtue. This paper contends that the concept of essence in the *Ethics* is crucial to the ethical project it permeates; an adequate consideration of the proper domain and object of Spinozistic ethics necessarily attends to the essences of things and how we can obtain knowledge of them. Working within the radical ontological framework Spinoza has provided, I endeavor to give a coherent account of how blessedness itself follows from knowledge of essences of singular things. Moreover, I argue that a full ethical project - relevant even to those who lack Spinozistic tendencies or the inclination to read his work - emerges in the course of the *Ethics*, if it is given the proper attention. In this section, I will present an interpretation of Spinoza's use of *essentia*, an understanding of which is crucial to discovering a vital element of philosophical knowledge - central to salvation - and therefore itself the object of the *Ethics*.

The term essence occurs in the very first definition of Part I of the *Ethics*, as does the term nature.<sup>4</sup> Both recur frequently at crucial points throughout the body of this section and throughout the rest of the work. However, before attending to the essence and nature of God - as it is God that Spinoza deals with in Part I - it will be helpful to examine the concepts in the

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<sup>4</sup> Curley writes in the English-Latin-Dutch Glossary-Index of *The Collected Works of Spinoza Volume I* under "Nature" (*natura*) that "Kline distinguishes three senses: 1) = universe or cosmos, 2) = kind, and 3) = essence. He contends that sense (1) is distinguished from the others by capitalization, but his data show that there is much inconsistency in the capitalization. Nevertheless, there are at least two senses which usually can be distinguished fairly easily: one in which *natura* = the whole of nature (in which it is frequently capitalized), and one in which *natura* = essence (in which case it is normally not capitalized)" (Curley 1984, p. 647). While Curley is right to identify the different uses of *natura*, I believe that the seeming ambiguity becomes less problematic when we do not generalize the use of essence. Moreover, it appears that sense (2) can be subsumed under sense (3) when it is understood that the 'form' or 'kind' of a mode (understood through an attribute) is an expression of its essence in the complete sense - by which I mean its essence accounting for both the actual and formal essence of a thing. I do not believe that the inconsistent capitalization Kline has uncovered when referring to *natura* as the cosmos or whole of nature was unintentional on Spinoza's part. The use of nature instead of essence when referring to a singular thing is possibly one way in which Spinoza gently reminds the philosopher to ground his adequate knowledge of singular things always in the eternal perspective, *sub specie aeternitatis* (which we will see is in fact the formal essence of modes).

*Ethics* as a whole. We need to be concerned about essences because of their crucial function in knowledge of the third kind, and therefore vital to achieving *beatitudo*. Spinoza, though he never simply or strictly defines essence, identifies it in three ways: essence (*essentia* without a modifier); actual essence (*essentia actualis*; for God, this is referred to as active essence, *essentia actuosa*); and formal essence (*essentia formalis*).<sup>5</sup>

I contend that essence, when used without a modifier or in a case where the modifier is absent and not obviously implied, often functions synonymously with the use of *natura*, particularly in the later part of the *Ethics*. *Essentia* used by itself can be read as an ambiguous, if not unintelligible, concept if one does not attend to the distinctions between essences that I argue Spinoza makes in the *Ethics*. This reading asserts that essence, when referred to by itself, usually is meant to refer to both actual and formal essence - what I will call 'essence in the complete sense'. Moreover, I contend that actual essence is the striving of an individual to persevere in its being - a striving which is expressed by a mode under every attribute - and that the principle of striving is found in all singular things but its expression is necessarily different. I claim this results from the different ideas that constitute and individuate Minds. Moreover, I assert that the formal essence is the mode when attended to insofar as its idea is in God, insofar as its idea cannot be conceived without God – indeed, *no thing* can. A consideration of several of the relevant passages in the *Ethics* that deal with these concepts will clarify and give this interpretation textual defense.

Though there is never an explicit definition of essence in *Ethics*,<sup>6</sup> Definition 2 of Part II reads

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<sup>5</sup> For a different and provocative take on essence in Spinoza, see. Matson (1990).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it would seem problematic if there was an explicit definition of essence provided, given the crucial role of essences in obtaining blessedness through adequate knowledge. It is useful to consider that a true ethical method

I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: also] taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing.

There are two significant points to make regarding this passage: first, that in ‘defining’ essence by describing what belongs to it, Spinoza has avoided understanding essence as a thing that exists with nontrivial ontological independence; secondly, he has crucially stated that ‘that without which a thing cannot be conceived’ belongs to that thing’s essence.<sup>7</sup>

The first point is significant because, according to Spinoza, there exists outside the intellect only the substance and the modes that are conceived through<sup>8</sup> it: “...outside the intellect there is nothing except substances and their affections.” (IP4d).<sup>9</sup> Don Garrett points out the ontological problem for the existence of essences - insofar as substance and modes are all that are - concluding that this suggests Spinoza conceived of essences as modes. Indeed, he goes on to argue that the “formal essences of singular things are existing infinite modes in their own right...” (Garrett 2009, p. 291). While there is some justification for Garrett’s assertion insofar as Spinoza writes that formal essences are eternal, immutable and infinite<sup>10</sup> it is problematic to understand essences as modes. If the formal essence of a thing is an infinite mode, it is therefore an affection of the substance in its own right and would seem to exist independently of the mode

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cannot be simply presented to the philosophical readership. For Spinoza, the ‘highest good of the mind’ is contemplation – the act of coming to understand through one’s own faculties.

<sup>7</sup> Several scholars have commented on ID8, arguing that ‘essence’ is an eternal truth; see Garrett (2009) and Schliesser (2011, p. 504). The Exposition of ID4 reads: “For such existence, like the essence of a thing, is conceived as an eternal truth...” Curley notes “Parkinson (171n) suggests that while ‘the essence of *a* thing’ is possible, ‘the essence of *the* thing is preferable,’ so as to imply only the essence of substance is eternal...” I agree partially with Parkinson’s claim. I believe in the context of this definition as a whole (“for such existence” clearly refers to the above passage - “by eternity I understand existence itself” – and not to existence known in duration, such as the existence of finite modes), the essence referred to is the essence of substance. However, I will maintain that there is an aspect from which the essence of all things is eternal.

<sup>8</sup> “By mode I understand the affections of a substance, *or* that which is in another through which it is also conceived” (ID5).

<sup>9</sup> For an excellent, albeit brief, and lucid discussion of Spinoza’s metaphysical system, see Garber (1990). I believe the account of the world and substance-mode relation Garber gives to be, besides being an enlightening consideration of Balibar’s work, a generally correct reading and one that coheres well with the project of this paper.

<sup>10</sup> See Garrett (2009, p. 290).

it is the essence of; however, by IID2 - “that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing” - Garrett’s claim would seem to argue that these particular infinite modes and finite modes are dependent on each other, indeed, that they must be conceived through each other. Moreover, if an essence is a mode, is it the case that there some modes – namely these infinite modes that are in fact essences themselves – that do not have essences? If all modes do have essences and we accept Garrett’s explanation, it would be the case that the infinite mode that is the essence of another mode would itself have an essence, causing an infinite and problematic regress.<sup>11</sup> I would argue that the use of essence in IID2 refers to both the actual and formal essences of a thing because both of these aspects of essence fit the conditions presented: clearly, any singular thing cannot be adequately conceived without both. In this case, the essence as an infinite mode becomes exponentially more problematic. For how can an infinite mode - apparently distinct in its existence as a mode - be both the actual and formal essence of another, apparently distinct mode?<sup>12</sup>

It appears we can reject the idea of essences as infinite modes. The question still remains, however, what exactly they are. To some extent, I believe this is the wrong question to ask. Essences do not exist in any proper sense, rather, we might understand them as particular ways of knowing a thing. For example, the idea of the actual essence of Micaela from my perspective, i.e. in my particular finite intellect, is my knowledge of her insofar as she affects and is affected by things in the world. The idea of Micaela in God is her formal essence. My idea when I attend

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<sup>11</sup> Every existing mode would have an infinite mode as an essence, which would have to be conceived through another infinite mode, presumably constituting nothing more than the essence of an essence, and so on to infinity.

<sup>12</sup> Consider the puzzling Spinozistic idea of immediate infinite modes (i.e., in Thought, the face of the universe or totality of ideas). An infinite mode as the essence in a complete sense of a singular thing would have to be both a mediate and immediate infinite mode – the formal essence (in the infinite intellect) and actual essence (in a causal nexus of other modes, albeit from an infinite perspective). One of the most helpful discussions of immediate infinite modes and mediate infinite modes can be found in Nadler (2008, p. 87-98).

to both these perspectives - to the greatest of my ability - is knowledge of her essence in a complete sense, i.e. the object of knowledge of the third kind.

The second point noted earlier regarding the relation of a thing and its essence - that the essence is that without which a thing cannot be conceived - is crucial to the argument of this paper. It is at this point that I make the essential distinction. There are two aspects of a mode that I will identify as belonging to its essence: the first thing that we can be sure of as belonging to the essence of a mode is God.<sup>13</sup> It is this aspect of the essence of singular things that I argue Spinoza identifies as the *formal essence*.<sup>14</sup>

*Essentia formalis* occurs explicitly only three times in the course of the *Ethics*, though there are many other instances where ‘essence’ used alone is clearly meant to refer to formal essence. To defend the claim made above that the formal essence of a singular thing is the thing insofar as it exists in God, I will examine the passages in which the phrase explicitly appears. Understanding the use of *essentia formalis* is crucial, because it is the formal essence that provides the foundation for a thing’s actual existence; understanding formal essence is therefore crucial to knowledge of the third kind. Formal essence makes its first appearance in Part I:

On the contrary, the truth and formal essence of things is what it is because it exists objectively in that way in God’s intellect. So God’s intellect, insofar as it is conceived to constitute God’s essence, is really the cause both of the essence and of the existence of things. (IP17S2)

Of the three explicit occurrences of the phrase ‘formal essence,’ this one, perhaps, requires the least explanation. That the formal essence of things exists objectively in God’s intellect, which is to say in the infinite intellect, indicates certain necessary qualities of the formal essence itself: most significantly, insofar as it exists in God, it must be eternal. That there is an aspect of a

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<sup>13</sup> “Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God” (IIP15). This falls into the criterion of IID2.

<sup>14</sup> The formal essence of a mode is of the mode *insofar as the mode is conceived through the substance*. That is to say, the mode *sub specie aeternitatis*.

singular thing that is necessarily eternal becomes crucially important in Part V, when Spinoza discusses the eternal part (*pars*) of the Mind, virtue, and the highest good of the Mind. It is knowledge of this eternal aspect of singular things that grounds knowledge of the third kind, and consequently leads to salvation *or* blessedness. Though the picture has not yet been made entirely clear, the foundation of the ethical project is emerging: formal essence, which is an eternal aspect of all things and provides a certain ontological unity, lays the groundwork for the blossoming moral philosophy.

At this point, we know that the formal essence of a mode is the idea of the mode in God, which is to say the mode insofar as it is a part of God; because God only has ideas of singular modes from the gaze of eternity, i.e. the idea of eternity itself. This is an idea of modes only insofar as they are a part of eternity. Moreover, insofar as anything is said to exist, it must be said to have a formal essence: for whatever is, is in God. There is some way in which God's idea of singular things is an idea of mode *qua* mode. To explain this, the complex substance-attribute-mode relation must be returned to. We know that two kinds of things *actually* exist: substance(s) and their affections (modes). Modes can be known by finite intellects, i.e. other modes, under different attributes, i.e. thought and extension. The substance is likewise known by the finite intellect through an attribute. Attributes, however, are not actually existing things – they are constructs of the finite intellect.<sup>15</sup> Modes, however, do *actually* exist. So God has an idea of modes - but not of attributes, through which modes are understood by the finite intellect - but his idea is of all modes, since his idea is of eternity; God's idea of any mode - God's idea of *all* modes - is adequate and perfect. So God's perfect idea of all modes is inherently different from the inadequate idea of a mode in a finite intellect, which is necessarily understood through an attribute. As one explores Spinozistic epistemology with more depth, the importance of

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<sup>15</sup> This is still debated in current scholarship. For a brief overview of the dispute, refer to Nadler, 2006 (148-150).

knowledge of God's perfect idea of modes in acquiring virtue will become clearer. So let us explore further.

There is an important reference to the formal essence and what we ought to understand by it in Part V, in the tying together of the project of the *Ethics*: "Nevertheless, in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human Body, under a gaze of eternity" (VP22).<sup>16</sup> Of course, this idea of a mode in God - which is to say its formal essence - is not an idea of a singular thing like ideas of singular things in the imagination. IIP27 states, "The idea of any affection of the human Body does not involve adequate knowledge of the human body itself." The idea of a human body in God surely cannot be inadequate - to attribute to God inadequate ideas would be absurd, see IIP32. God has an idea of eternity in which man exists. God's idea of the mode in eternity is the idea of eternity itself.<sup>17</sup> This argument extends to both the attribute of thought and extension: "There is also in God an idea, *or* knowledge, of the human Mind, which follows in God in the same way and is related to God in the same way as the idea, *or* knowledge of the human Body" (IIP20). This, given our reading of the metaphysical substance-mode relation, should be clear.

The next explicit appearance of *essentia formalis* may illuminate not only on the concept of formal essence itself, but also how we ought to understand actual essence: "The ideas of singular things, *or* of modes, that do not exist must be comprehended in God's infinite idea in the same way as the formal essence of the singular things, *or* modes, are contained in God's attributes" (IIP8). Attributes, per Part I, are that which "the intellect perceives of a substance, as

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<sup>16</sup> Here I have altered Curley's translation, opting to translate *specie* as "gaze" rather than "species."

<sup>17</sup> See also VP29: "Whatever the Mind understands under a gaze of eternity, it understands not from the fact that I conceive the Body's present actual existence, but from the fact that it conceives the Body's essence under a gaze of eternity."

if constituting its essence” (ID4).<sup>18</sup> It seems plausible that formal essences are not - and therefore cannot be - conceived solely through any particular attribute since God does not know himself through the attributes; God’s essence is merely perceived by the finite intellect through any given attribute. If this is the case, then ideas of modes that do not exist, i.e. do not have an *actual* essence, are comprehended in God’s infinite idea in only a trivial way. However, it seems that Spinoza would grant non-existing singular things a formal essence, at least insofar as they are contemplated by the finite intellect.<sup>19</sup> It is in the scholium to this proposition (IIP8S) that Spinoza seems to provide a tool for understanding formal and actual essence. He uses the example of a circle, in which intersecting lines form infinitely many rectangles. None of the rectangles can be said to exist except insofar as the circle exists, “nor also can the idea of any of these rectangles be said to exist except insofar as it is comprehended in the idea of the circle.”<sup>20</sup> Let a certain

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<sup>18</sup> I must note that here I take exception with Curley’s translation. He writes “...the intellect perceives of a substance, **as** constituting its essence” (emphasis mine). The original Latin reads *tanquam*, which can be rendered ‘as if’ or ‘as.’ The former supports the idea that attributes are not things distinct from the substance, but illusory insofar as they are constructions of the intellect in order to conceive God’s essence (which is otherwise inaccessible to the intellect of a finite mode). Curley argues against this understanding of the attributes, and writes that Gueroult definitively refutes the interpretation; they assert that “the attributes are really distinct and not merely constructions of the intellect.” Moreover, Curley also states that “Arguably the intellect referred to in this definition (ID4) is the infinite intellect, not the finite.” This seems highly unlikely. That God would perceive himself – the substance – through attributes contradicts the basic and fundamental tenet that God’s idea (of himself) is eternal. If God perceived his essence through any given attribute, he could not simultaneously perceive his essence through any other attribute (see IIP1, IIP2 and IIP7S); consequently, there would be something outside of God, which has been shown to be absurd. Moreover, IP31 reads, “The actual intellect, whether finite or infinite, like will, desire, love etc., must be referred to *Natura naturata*, not to *Natura naturans*.” Therefore, we cannot, in any nontrivial sense, understand the intellect referred to here as God himself; since the attributes are conceived through the intellect (which by IP30 has true ideas only of attributes and modes), it seems clear God has no knowledge of them *qua* attributes.

<sup>19</sup> For example, the idea I have of a unicorn actually exists as an idea in me, a finite mode, and insofar as it is in me, it is in God. However, the unicorn exists under the attribute of extension only insofar as I have a brain state that correlates to the idea of the unicorn I have under the attribute of thought. So its existence and its formal essence are in God only trivially. There is, however, no reason to claim Spinoza denies the existence – in the past, present or future – of unicorns. It is possible they did, do or will exist at some point. If this is the case, then unicorns would have an actual essence. If not, however, they would not exist in the exact same way square circles do not exist, i.e. they *cannot* exist. For Spinoza, there are no unactualized possibles.

<sup>20</sup> The entire scholium reads:

“If anyone wishes me to explain this further by an example, I will, of course, not be able to give one which adequately explains what I speak of here, since it is unique. Still I shall try as far as possible to illustrate the matter: the circle is of such a nature that the rectangles formed from the segments of all the straight lines intersecting in it are equal to one another. So in a circle there are contained infinitely many rectangles that are equal to one another.

number of these rectangles ‘actually’ exist. These rectangles now exist not only as understood through the circle but also insofar as they involve the existence of the rectangles. This point highlights the difference between formal essence and actual essence: the formal essence of the rectangle is the ‘existence’ of the rectangle insofar as it is comprehended through the circle; the actual essence of the rectangle is the existence of the rectangle insofar as it is comprehended through the rectangle itself;<sup>21</sup> the rectangle actually exists as a ‘modification’ of the circle.

How will grounding knowledge of the rectangles in the circle ever translate to an ethical project that emerges from knowledge of the essences of modes in God? Adequately knowing singular things is knowing them in the substance: “Each idea of each body, or of each singular thing which actually exists, necessarily involves an eternal and infinite essence of God” (IIP45). The proposition clearly refers to formal essence and its scholium leaves no doubt.<sup>22</sup> Ideas of singular things involve the eternal essence of God, i.e. adequate ideas of singular things are grounded in their formal essences. Knowing the rectangles through the circle allow us to fully and adequately know the rectangles, and from this knowledge - when applied to modes and substance - emerges an ethics of living.

The third and final explicit occurrence of *essentia formalis* is in IIP40S2. This, however, treats of formal essence as an object of adequate knowledge, and therefore discussion of this

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Nevertheless, none of them can be said to exist except insofar as the circle exists, nor also can the idea of any of these rectangles be said to exist except insofar as it is comprehended in the idea of the circle. Now of these infinitely many [rectangles] let two only, viz. [those formed from the segments of lines] D and E, exist. Of course their ideas also exist now, not only insofar as they are only comprehended in the idea of the circle, but also insofar as they involve the existence of those rectangles. By this they are distinguished from the other ideas of the other rectangles.”

<sup>21</sup> Attending to the actual essence of a singular thing, when done adequately, is necessarily grounded in a simultaneous attending to the formal essence of the singular thing. It is clear that one could attempt to attend to the rectangle in itself, but an adequate, i.e. true, conception of the rectangle is had through circle as well.

<sup>22</sup> “By existence here I do not understand duration, i.e., existence insofar as it is conceived abstractly, and as a certain species of quantity. For I am speaking of the very nature of existence, which is attributed to singular things because infinitely many things follow from the eternal necessity of God’s nature in infinitely many modes (see IP16). **I am speaking, I say, of the very existence of singular things insofar as they are in God.** For even if each one is determined by another singular thing to exist in a certain way, still the force by which each one perseveres in existing follows from the eternal necessity of God’s nature. Concerning this, see IP24C” (emphasis mine). This is perhaps one of the clearest discussions on how one ought to understand the concept of formal essence.

particular passage will be considered fully in the next section of this paper, which discusses Spinoza's epistemology. In any case, the explicit uses of formal essence shown above have made clear what is meant by the phrase. It is one way to have knowledge of a thing; it is knowledge of a singular thing in God. But insofar as that without which a thing cannot be conceived belongs to that thing's essence, there must be a part of the essence that is not accounted for through formal essence alone. It is this that I identify as *essentia actualis*.

The explicit use of *essentia actualis* is no less complex than the concept of formal essence. The phrase 'actual essence' first appears in IIP7: "The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing." Another explicit use of the phrase occurs at a most crucial point, in the demonstration of IVP4.<sup>23</sup>

The power by which singular things (and consequently, [any] man) preserve their being is the power itself of God, *or* Nature (by IP24C), not insofar as it is infinite, but insofar as it can be explained through the man's actual essence (by IIP7). The man's power, therefore, insofar as it is explained through his actual essence, is part of God *or* Nature's infinite power, i.e. (by IP34), of its essence.

Formal essence, we have seen, provides the ground for the existence of modes. Actual essence of a singular thing – the expression of the power of a singular thing, which is to say the striving by which a singular thing strives to persevere in its being - is part of the cause of the existence of modes in duration.<sup>24</sup> The particulars of the existence of a mode are determined by its relation to other modes that it affects and by which it is affected. The actual existence of any finite mode follows from another finite mode, and so on to infinity,<sup>25</sup> because each finite mode is caused by another finite mode, and so on. From this, I claim that knowledge of a thing's actual essence

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<sup>23</sup> The proposition itself (which will be absolutely crucial later in this paper) reads: "It is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause."

<sup>24</sup> See IIP9.

<sup>25</sup> See IP28. In regards to infinite modes, see IP23.

involves knowledge of the causal, affective, and relational nexus of modes that singular thing is a part of.

An understanding of the actual essence of a thing – its striving<sup>26</sup> to persevere in its being – is, of course, more complex than it might initially appear. First, I suggest there is a crucial distinction to be made between the principle of striving (*conatus*) and the expression of that principle. Both refer to the actual essence of an individual, but it is the latter that distinguishes one individual from another. Second, the striving of a thing, Spinoza tells us, is an expression of its power, and a thing's power grounds its virtue. The relation should not be simply assumed as transitive. Nonetheless, the ultimate ethical project should be revealing itself more fully. To begin, let us consider *conatus* as a principle of existence for all modes. It is introduced specifically and discussed in Part III, propositions 6-9, including their demonstrations and scholia. In order to properly make sense of these passages, it will also be necessary to consider some of the early propositions in Part II.

IIIP6 reads: “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being.” This striving, as we noted in IIIP7, is the actual essence of the thing. It is in the demonstration of this proposition that the striving of a thing is identified with its power:

From the given essence of each thing some things necessarily follow (by IP36) and things are able [to produce] nothing but what follows necessarily from their determinate nature (IP29). So the power of each thing, *or* the striving by which it (either alone or with others) does anything, or strives to do anything—i.e. (by P6), the power, *or*

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<sup>26</sup> In the Glossary-Index, of ‘striving’ (*conatus*), Curley writes “Elwes, White: *endeavor*. The term *conatus* is often left untranslated in the secondary literature. There is much to be said for this, since any translation will be contentious and potentially misleading. *Endeavor* is one classical meaning of *conatus*, along with *effort*, *exertion*, *struggle*, *attempt*, etc. (LS)... The real question is whether *conatus* should be rendered by *tendency*, also a classical meaning of *conatus*.” Curley suggests that Spinozistic-Cartesian physics would support – due to the law of inertia – translating *conatus* as *tendency*. However, he rightly notes “Spinoza deliberately uses a term which he is aware will suggest the presence of a psychic state.” In this paper, I opt to use Curley’s translation, *striving*, or the original Latin, *conatus*.

striving, by which it strives to persevere in its being, is nothing but the given, *or* actual, essence of the thing itself, q.e.d. (IIP7d)<sup>27</sup>

It is clear that the power and *conatus* of a thing refer to one in the same in principle and in expression. This is also rightly understood as the principle and expression of the striving of the thing, which is to say the actual essence; moreover, I assert that knowledge of essence in a complete sense and knowledge of a singular thing's nature seem to be used to refer to generally the same aspect of a thing, i.e., knowledge of a thing's striving, grounded in its formal essence.

In the expression of the *conatus* principle we have uncovered an aspect of singular things that suggests each has a unique essence. Indeed, the principle of *conatus* itself is universal to singular things<sup>28</sup> – they all *strive* – but it is the manner of their striving that differentiates them. It is the act of striving itself – the expression of *conatus* – that distinguishes individuals; moreover, as this striving under the attribute of extension is the *ratio* of motion and rest<sup>29</sup> of a body, it individuates it: “Bodies are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance” (IIL1). Indeed, should the principle of *conatus* and its expression apply to a mode under the attribute of thought (i.e. the Mind), by IIP7 it must have a correlate under the attribute of extension (i.e. the Body).

The theory of differentiation should now be apparent. “The essence of the Mind is constituted by adequate and by inadequate ideas (as we have shown in P3)” (IIP9D).<sup>30</sup> Insofar as

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<sup>27</sup> Here Spinoza relates ‘given essence’ and actual essence with the Latin *sive*, therefore we should understand by given essence nothing other than actual essence, with an emphasis on the determination of singular things; see IP29. Additionally, given or actual essence seems to be identified with determinate nature.

<sup>28</sup> Spinoza uses ‘individual’ as a technical term. In his short exposition of physics in Part II he writes: “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 (*ratio*), we shall say that those bodies are united with one another and that they all together compose one body *or* Individual, which is distinguished from the others by this union of bodies.” Individuals are then nothing but bodies (composite bodies surely, though it is not clear if simple bodies are Individuals) and by this identification, I use ‘individual’ and ‘singular thing’ synonymously. Further support of this use can be found in IID1 and IIL2D. Spinoza uses ‘singular thing’ and ‘mode’ interchangeably.

<sup>29</sup> IIP6 and IIP6D. See Nadler (2006, p.195).

<sup>30</sup> “The actions of the Mind arise from adequate ideas alone; the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone” (IIP3).

Minds contain adequate ideas and therefore act by the dictates of reason, they are of the same nature;<sup>31</sup> insofar as they are constituted by passions - inadequate ideas - they are different, and therefore distinct.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Descartes, whose God is constantly sustaining the world, Spinoza seems to put forth a kind of inner dynamism - and, like Leibniz, this may lead him into trouble. By inner dynamism I mean to suggest that it is the continuous and indefinite striving of the individual - determined by what constitutes the Mind - that preserves his being, not merely the constant sustaining by the power of God. "Both insofar as the Mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives, for an indefinite duration, to persevere in its being and it is conscious of this striving it has" (IIP9).<sup>33</sup> The manner *or* expression of striving follows from that which constitutes the Mind, which is to say adequate and inadequate ideas (by IIP9D). If part of what constitutes the Mind is variant, i.e. inadequate ideas, it is this part that can be understood to distinguish Individuals. Moreover, "insofar as men are subject to passions, they cannot be said to agree in nature" (IVP32),<sup>34</sup> and are therefore distinct. A singular thing, that is say, a mode, is distinguished as an individual under the attribute of extension by reason of its *ratio* of motion and rest, and under the attribute of thought, by reason of its striving - actual essence - insofar as it is constituted by inadequate ideas.

This reading of Spinoza's argument is further supported by IIP10C, which states "From this it follows that the essence of man is constituted by certain modifications of God's attributes." This suggests that some aspect of the intellect's idea of the essence of a thing is

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<sup>31</sup> "Only insofar as men live according to the guidance of reason, must they always agree in nature" (IVP35).

<sup>32</sup> "Insofar as men are subject to passions, they cannot be said to agree in nature" (IVP32).

<sup>33</sup> IIP8 describes the striving of a thing as indefinite. Indeed, it cannot be understood as infinite (the striving begins and ends with the finite mode, insofar as it has duration); nor can striving be understood as finite, or limited, for then its own essence (by its limited nature) would determine the thing's destruction (at the end of its limit). The demonstration adequately shows this: "For if [the striving by which a thing strives to persevere in its being] involved a limited time, which determined the thing's duration, then it would follow just from that very power by which the thing exists that it could not exist after that limited time, but that it would have to be destroyed. But (by P4) this is absurd. Therefore, the striving by which a thing exists involves no definite time..."

<sup>34</sup> See also IIP14.

determined by its form or kind – the ‘essence of man’ has commonality within an attribute. The intellect’s idea of the actual essences of men have some universality among them in such a way that men are distinguished from, for example, horses.<sup>35</sup> That there are universal notions that can be called forms or kinds (and which, being specific to a kind cannot be understood through formal essence) is established by IIP40S1: “Those notions they call *Universal*, like Man, Horse, Dog, have arisen from similar causes, viz. because so many images (e.g. of men) are formed at one time in the human Body that they surpass the power of imagining...”<sup>36</sup> These notions must be a part of the actual essence insofar as they are a construction of the intellect, and not in God except insofar as they are an idea in a Mind. For indeed the idea of a universal notion varies between the individual Minds: “But it should be noted that these notions are not formed by all [NS: men] in the same way, but vary from one to another in accordance with what the body has more often been affected by, and what the Mind imagines or recollects more easily” (IIP40S1). The distinction, insofar as it varies from one to another due to the affections of each, cannot be said to be in God except insofar as it is in a Mind. However, it is not clear that Spinoza gives us a coherent doctrine of ‘human nature’ as such; in any case, it is more beneficial to the aims of this paper to focus on the issue of the nature of individuals.

We see now that *conatus*, actual essence, and power all refer to the same aspect of a thing.<sup>37</sup> It should be noted, however, that for the substance, which is to say God, Spinoza uses

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<sup>35</sup> As I noted earlier, Kline’s point (2) when distinguishing uses of *natura* (that it refers to form or kind) can be subsumed under point (3) – *natura*, meaning essence (in the complete sense), since the intellect’s idea of actual essence seems to involve a singular thing’s form or kind. See also the end of the Preface to Part IV.

<sup>36</sup> See also IIP57S, where he makes a distinction between animal nature and human nature: “From this it follows that the affects of animals which are called irrational (for after we know the origin of the Mind, we cannot in any way doubt that the lower animals feel things) differ from men’s affects as much as their nature differs from human nature. Both the horse and the man are driven by a Lust to procreate; but the one is driven by an equine Lust, and the other by a human Lust...” This makes sense; if essences (in the complete sense) differ among men, surely they differ between men and the ‘lower animals.’

<sup>37</sup> Also, in considering the actual essence, it is useful to note: “When this striving is related only to the Mind, it is called Will; but when it is related to the Mind and Body together, it is called Appetite. **This Appetite, therefore, is**

the term *essentia actuosa*: “God’s power is his essence itself” (IP34), indeed, “...God’s power is nothing except God’s active essence” (IIP3S). God cannot, in any nontrivial sense, have an actual essence. God cannot have power in the same way singular things are understood to have power because he is pure actuality or pure action. As the substance, his active essence does not consist of modifications of his attributes – we have shown that to speak of God knowing his attributes is absurd – but is rather constituted by existence itself.<sup>38</sup> Since the actual essence of a thing depends on knowledge of active and passive affects,<sup>39</sup> which are only conceived through the finite intellect, and are consequently concerned with the relations of finite modes, it does not rightly pertain to God. What ultimately constitutes this difference is that God is not acted upon - he is completely self-determining<sup>40</sup> - whereas finite modes are necessarily affected by other finite modes.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, Spinoza uses ‘active essence’ to describe God’s power.

Power and virtue are, in a crucial sense, the same thing: “By virtue and power I understand the same thing...” (IVD8) and “...the foundation of virtue is this very striving to preserve one’s own being, and that happiness consists in man’s being able to preserve his being” (IVP18S). As we have seen from IIP7D, the manner of striving is the expression of a thing’s power. Virtue in itself is in fact this principle of striving; the manner of striving (the expression of the *conatus*) of any singular thing is nothing other than that singular thing’s virtue. It should now be somewhat clearer that, as was suggested before, a simple relation of transitivity between power, virtue and actual essence is a dangerous oversimplification. Happiness - blessedness -

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**nothing but the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation. And so man is determined to do those things.** Between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious of their appetite. So *desire* can be defined as *appetite together with consciousness of the appetite*” (IIP9S, emphasis mine).

<sup>38</sup> “By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing” (ID1).

<sup>39</sup> This was shown in IIP3, as both active and passive affects constitute the Mind.

<sup>40</sup> “That thing is called free which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone” (ID7).

<sup>41</sup> See IVP4 and IVP4C.

results from one's power of acting, one's degree of self-determinacy, i.e. one's virtue. We can finally see the emergence of an ethical system, one based on the happiness of individuals, a blessedness that results from their power. This power is expressed in a particular, virtuous way, which we see in Part V.

The problem that this section must conclude with is the relation of *essentia* and *natura*. This relation is important because Spinoza begins talking more and more about a thing's nature - in particular human nature - in Part IV and V. If one accepts my reading of Spinoza's concept of essence and applies the idea of essence in the complete sense to nature as it is used in Part IV and V, I believe we can begin to make sense of these curious sections; indeed, I suspect one way of understanding the method of achieving blessedness - and therefore a means to understanding the *Ethics* - is through a proper understanding of *essentia* or nature.<sup>42</sup>

“Virtue, insofar as it is related to man, is the very **essence, or nature**, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things, which can be understood through the **laws of his nature alone**” (IVD8, emphasis mine). The use of the Latin *sive* (rendered ‘or,’ but more fully understood as ‘which is to say’) identifies essence and nature.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, what should be understood by a man's ‘power of bringing about certain things’ is man's relation to other modes, the affect(s) he has on them - as opposed to the affect(s) other modes have on him, which are from his perspective passive affects. It has been argued above that this relation between a mode and other modes – i.e. how a thing affects and is affected – is the actual essence of a singular thing. Virtue, it should then be understood, is the aspect of a man's essence, i.e. of his nature,

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<sup>42</sup> In the Preface to Part IV, Spinoza discusses a “model” (*exemplar*) of human nature. Many commentators, including Garber (2004) and Della Rocca (2008) argue that “human nature” is used to refer to this exemplar. While I can see the case for this argument in regards to the propositions dealing with the free man in Part IV, I believe by Part V this argument has dissolved.

<sup>43</sup> See also IIP10 and its scholium, which equate the essence (in the proposition) and nature (in the scholium) of man. Moreover, we should here understand virtue to mean the manner of striving of a man. This striving is a part of his nature or essence; it is his ‘power of bringing about certain things.’

‘insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things.’ Simply, a man’s virtue is his power of acting. His specific manner of acting is determined by what constitutes his mind - i.e. his actual essence - and it is his manner of acting following from this that is rightly understood as his virtue. If we understand the virtue of a thing as its striving, as well as its nature, we can begin to see how *essentia* and *natura* point at generally the same aspect of a thing.<sup>44</sup>

In the preface to Part IV, Spinoza writes about man’s desire to “form an idea of man, as a model of human nature which we may look to.” It is this model of human nature by which we understand things to be good or bad: “In what follows, therefore, I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature we set before ourselves.” Indeed, given the earlier interpretation of virtue, it is clear that good and evil should be understood in this way: this ‘model of human nature’ must include both the formal and actual essence of man in his most virtuous state. Becoming more virtuous - more like the most virtuous man, i.e. the model of human nature - and therefore more free is what is here called *good*, while becoming less virtuous and more tightly in bondage to the passions is what is here called *evil*.<sup>45</sup> As we saw above, virtue is the manner of striving to persevere in one’s being; the more adequate knowledge one has, the more virtuous his striving will be. The more adequate knowledge one has, the closer one will come to the *exemplar* of human nature. Adequate knowledge, we see, has the same effect on a thing’s essence as it does on its nature – from either perspective, the thing becomes more virtuous. The concept of virtue involves both *essentia* and *natura*.

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<sup>44</sup> Another way of defending the identity of essence and nature is by citing passages at the end of Part V, the section of the *Ethics* that is often scorned and dismissed but arguably the most important to understanding the overall project, and therefore most relevant for making the connections necessary to rendering the rest of the *Ethics* intelligible. It discusses the nature of man and the third kind of knowledge, which we know by IIP40S2 is knowledge that proceeds from the formal essences of the attributes to the essences of singular things.

<sup>45</sup> See also Letter 19 (5 January 1665) to Blyenbergh.

One final and convincing passage that indicates the relation of essence and nature is IVP68S. The proposition reads: “If men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remained free...” and the scholium: “It is evident from P4 that the hypothesis of this proposition is false, and cannot be conceived unless we attend only to human nature, *or* rather to God, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar only as he is the cause of man’s existence.”<sup>46</sup> That man can be born perfectly free - and therefore not be a part of Nature, insofar as he would be self-caused - is incoherent. Attempting to consider a man independently of nature would be like trying to consider man’s power of acting without considering those things he is acting on. Human nature must be conceived through Nature - which is to say God - and in relation to other modes, both insofar as it affects and is affected, in the same way that the essence of man is the unified formal essence – the mode insofar as it is conceived through God – and the actual essence – insofar as it is conceived in a relational and causal nexus of other actually existing modes. The nature of a singular thing, when considered this way, is unique to each mode. Knowledge of this uniqueness, of the essence of a thing itself, gives us knowledge about how we affect and are affected by things external to us. Here is the force of our ethical project.

To conclude this section, let me point again to IVD8. First, it should be noted that this could also be read as ‘the actual essence of man is the very essence, *or* nature of man when we consider man solely as a mode that stands in relation with other modes.’ This is what has been identified in this section as the actual essence of a singular thing. However, it has become clear that adequate knowledge of the essence of a singular thing, knowledge of the third kind, cannot be limited to this: adequate knowledge of a thing is knowledge that unites the actual and formal essence of the thing. This means grounding the understanding of the mode as a singular thing

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<sup>46</sup> “It is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause” (IVP4).

that stands in relation to other modes in knowledge of its existence insofar as it is an idea in God. This appears to be the way by which we obtain adequate knowledge of essences of singular things, i.e. the object of knowledge of the third kind *or* intuitive knowledge. Let us now, then, consider Spinoza's epistemology in more detail.

### **On Knowledge**

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

Spinoza's epistemology plays a crucial role in his ethical project; moreover, for Spinoza, morality and epistemology are found hand-in-hand.<sup>47</sup> So, to uncover the method of achieving blessedness that Spinoza presents in the *Ethics*, we must apply our understanding of essences while investigating his epistemology; having discussed essences, the next rational step is to look at their role in relation to knowledge. Spinoza delineates three kinds of knowledge and their objects. Part II is the main section of the *Ethics* that is concerned with knowledge itself, but the application and significance of this knowledge is most thoroughly discussed in Parts IV and V. Necessary to an adequate understanding of the project of the *Ethics* is an exploration of Spinoza's epistemology, since it is through knowledge of the third kind that the philosopher becomes virtuous. Any investigation of knowledge of the second and third kinds with the aim of understanding how to achieve blessedness will encounter the role of essences. This section will consider knowledge of the first, second and third kinds, the relation of knowledge and essences,

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<sup>47</sup> Nadler writes: "Spinoza believes that knowledge and adequate understanding are the key to human happiness, freedom and well-being, and so addressing these epistemological questions constitutes a major step in his overall moral project" (Nadler 2006, p. 155).

and what each state of knowledge (and therefore state of existence) entails for the finite intellect - from imagination to reason to intuition.

Before diving into the different kinds of knowledge, it will be useful to briefly explore the technical vocabulary that Spinoza uses when giving us his epistemologically-grounded ethical project. There are two *types* of knowledge, adequate and inadequate, a divide that is also made between ideas. For Spinoza, an idea is “a concept of the Mind that the Mind forms because it is a thinking thing” (IID3).<sup>48</sup> The Mind is constituted by ideas, both adequate and inadequate.<sup>49</sup> An adequate idea is not only by its nature true, but complete.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, he who has an adequate, i.e., true, idea “at the same time knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing” (IVP43). Propositions 27 to 31 in Part II describe some of those things that we can only have inadequate knowledge of, e.g. ideas of the affects of the human Body or the human Mind, insofar as they are related only to the human Body or Mind, or the duration of our Body and singular things which are external to us.<sup>51</sup> Both adequate and inadequate ideas constitute the mind, and it is impossible that human intellect will ever consist entirely of adequate ideas, i.e. be perfectly free.<sup>52</sup> There are two main faculties of the mind: the imagination, concerned with inadequate ideas, and the intellect, concerned with adequate ideas. As shown in the previous section, these ideas constitute a part of human nature insofar as a mode’s manner of striving to persevere in its being is determined by its nature.<sup>53</sup> So to explore fully how the

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<sup>48</sup> “Exp.: *I say concept rather than perception because the word perception seems to indicate that the Mind is acted on by the object. But concept seems to express an action of the mind.*” (IID3)

<sup>49</sup> IIP3

<sup>50</sup> “By adequate idea I understand an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to an object, has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations of a true idea.

Exp.: *I say intrinsic to exclude what is extrinsic, viz. the agreement of the idea with its object*” (IID4).

<sup>51</sup> IIP27, IIP28, IIP29, IIP30, IIP31.

<sup>52</sup> For an interesting take on the impossibility of the perfectly free man and the role of the ‘model of human nature,’ see Garber (2004). I agree with Garber’s conclusion that for man a state of perfect freedom is impossible.

<sup>53</sup> “From this it follows that the Mind is more liable to passions the more it has inadequate ideas, and conversely, is more active the more it has adequate ideas” (IIIP1C).

manner of striving or power of acting of modes could differ based on what constitutes their intellects, it will be crucial to examine what each of the three kinds of knowledge are concerned with.

Spinoza outlines the three distinct kinds of knowledge he has introduced in IIP40S2. The first kind of knowledge he defines as follows:

From what has been said above, it is clear that we perceive many things and form universal notions:

I. from singular things which have been represented to us through the senses in a way that is mutilated, confused, and without order for the intellect (see P29C); for that reason I have been accustomed to call such perceptions knowledge from random experience;

II. from signs, e.g., from the fact that, having heard or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them, which are like them, and through which we imagine the things (P18S). There two ways of regarding things I shall henceforth call knowledge of the first kind, opinion or imagination.

To knowledge of the first kind belong all ideas that are inadequate and confused.<sup>54</sup> The objects of knowledge of the first kind are those things conceived by the imagination (rather than the intellect), those things that are not understood through their essence or through their causes, and those things conceived from the “common order of nature.”<sup>55</sup> Inadequate and confused ideas, ideas belonging to knowledge of the first kind, “follow with the same necessity as adequate, *or* clear and distinct ideas” (IIP36).<sup>56</sup> Knowledge of the first kind – i.e. inadequate ideas – is crucial to the nature of finite modes because it is what follows from their nature. This is to say that it is a necessary consequence of the fact that a finite mode exists in a durational network of causal relations with other finite modes; all finite modes strive to persevere in their being, resulting in

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<sup>54</sup> IIP41

<sup>55</sup> “From this it follows that so long as the human Mind perceives things from the common order of nature, it does not have an adequate, but only a confused and mutilated knowledge of itself, of its own Body, and of external bodies” (IIP29C).

<sup>56</sup> The demonstration of this proposition is enlightening: “All ideas are in God (by IP15); and, insofar as they are related to God, are true (by P32), and (by P7C) adequate. And so there are no inadequate or confused ideas except insofar as they are related to the singular Mind of someone (see P24 and P28). And so all ideas – both the adequate and the inadequate – follow with the same necessity (by P6C), q.e.d.”

continuous action and being acted upon. This collection of adequate and inadequate ideas that constitute a thing's Mind and determines them to a certain manner of acting also distinguishes them and makes them more or less virtuous and more or less free. The argument goes something like this: "The passions depend on inadequate ideas alone" (IIP3); and because "man is necessarily always subject to passions" (IVP4C),<sup>57</sup> "men can disagree in nature insofar as they are torn by affects which are passions" (IVP33). Those men with inadequate ideas are the least useful to their fellow men,<sup>58</sup> and the least virtuous, i.e. least powerful or least capable of preserving their being. Put another way, men are useful to each other insofar as they agree in nature (by IVP31C); men agree in nature only insofar as they are not subject to passions. The more they are not subject to the passions, the more they are free, which is to say the more they are virtuous. The more free a man, i.e. the more self-determined he is, the more useful he is to his fellow men, and vice versa. The striving of a man with a wealth of inadequate ideas will be confused, inconstant, and changeable as a direct reflection of the kind of knowledge that constitutes his Mind. This is the man in bondage to the passions. The virtuous man - the man striving to become more virtuous - or the true philosopher desires adequate ideas and spends his time in contemplation, living by "sure maxims of life."<sup>59</sup> To do this, he requires knowledge of the second and third kind.

Knowledge of the second kind is adequate knowledge of 'common' notions – a tricky concept – and of properties of things:

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<sup>57</sup> "Insofar as men are subject to passions they cannot be said to agree in nature" (IVP32) – that which is contrary to one's nature "will also be contrary to that which agrees with our nature, i.e. (by P31), contrary to the good, *or* evil" (IVP31C).

<sup>58</sup> IVP31C

<sup>59</sup> "The best thing, then, that we can do, so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects, is to conceive a correct principle of living, *or* sure maxims of life, to commit them to memory, and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life" (VP10S).

III. Finally, from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things (see P38C, P39, P39C, and P40). This I shall call reason and the second kind of knowledge. (IIP40S2)

It should be noted that ‘common’ notions are *not* the ‘universal’ notions discussed earlier. These universal notions are formed by the finite intellect regarding ‘forms’ or ‘kinds,’ as was shown in the previous section to be inadequate.<sup>60</sup> Common notions, on the contrary, always constitute adequate knowledge.<sup>61</sup> In IIP37<sup>62</sup> Spinoza directs the reader to IIL2 in his brief physical treatise: “*All bodies agree in certain things*. Dem.: For all bodies agree in that they involve the concept of one and the same attribute (by D1), and in that they can move now more slowly, now more quickly, and absolutely, that now they move, now they are at rest.” Eric Schliesser (2011) argues persuasively for a new interpretation of common notions: “common notions are structural features that all modes *within* an attribute share...So, just as there are common notions of modes of extension, so there must be common notions of modes of thought” (Schliesser 2011, p. 512). I believe this interpretation offers a bold way to conceive of knowledge of the second kind, and indeed helps provide a more coherent epistemological picture.<sup>63</sup> By this account, common notions are “intrinsic properties of modes within an attribute” (Schliesser 2011, p. 512). As Schliesser notes, attributing geometrical examples which suggest numbers as an object of

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<sup>60</sup> “But it should be noted that these notions are not formed by all [NS: men] in the same way, but vary from one to another, in accordance with what the body has more often been affected by, and what the Mind imagines or recollects more easily...” (IIP40S1).

<sup>61</sup> See IIP38: “Those things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and in the whole, can only be conceived adequately.” See also IIP39: “If something is common to, and particular to, the human Body and certain external bodies by which the human Body is usually affected, and is equally in the part and in the whole of each of them, its idea will also be adequate in the Mind.”

<sup>62</sup> “What is common to all things (on this see L2, above) and is equally in the part and in the whole, does not constitute the essence of any singular thing” (IIP37).

<sup>63</sup> For an alternative account of common notions, which I find problematic and therefore will not discuss here, see Huenemann (2008, p. 96): “Though Spinoza rarely offers examples, the set of common notions surely includes the ideas of extension, of motion and of rest, of geometrical shape and of arithmetic quantity, and of whatever other general features of the extended world are required to construct an adequate physics...” Schliesser provides compelling reasons not to consider Spinoza’s common notions as regarding a physical science (such as the one provided by Descartes); see Schliesser (2011, p. 511-515).

knowledge of the second kind (James 2011, p. 194) is highly problematic in light of Spinoza's letter to Meyer on 20 April 1663.<sup>64</sup>

For this paper, what is truly crucial regarding knowledge of the second kind is that it is useful to the process of obtaining knowledge of the third kind and therefore to obtaining blessedness.<sup>65</sup> The second kind of knowledge, i.e. knowledge of properties shared by all modes, is what Spinoza calls 'reason.' It is important to note that although common notions are available to all<sup>66</sup> and can only be perceived adequately, this does not entail that all men actually perceive them. Moreover, this will turn out to be crucial for Spinoza's project of blessedness: common notions cannot provide us with an insight into the essences of things.<sup>67</sup>

Knowledge of the third kind, *or* intuitive knowledge, is one of the most complex puzzles in Spinoza scholarship. It plays a fundamental role in attaining freedom and blessedness and therefore makes up much of the crucial Part V 'On the Power of the Intellect *or* On Human Freedom.'<sup>68</sup> In spite of this, it is never made clear exactly what is the object of intuitive knowledge, indeed it is even less clear than what can be known as a common notion. However, whatever the object of intuitive knowledge is, we can be sure it is essential to achieving blessedness.<sup>69</sup> Spinoza first discusses knowledge of the third kind immediately following his brief enumeration of the other kinds of knowledge in IIP40S2:

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<sup>64</sup> "You can see clearly from what I have said that Measure, Time, and Number are nothing but Modes of thinking, or rather, of imagining. So it is no wonder that all those who have striven to understand the course of Nature by such notions – which in addition have been badly understood – have so marvelously entangled themselves that in the end they have not been able to untangle themselves without breaking through everything and admitting even the most absurd absurdities" (Letter 12, 'On the Nature of the Infinite' 20 April 1663).

<sup>65</sup> "The Striving, or Desire, to know things by the third kind of knowledge cannot arise from the first kind of knowledge, but can indeed arise from the second" (VP28).

<sup>66</sup> "From this it follows that there are certain ideas, *or* notions, common to all men" (IIP38C).

<sup>67</sup> VP28

<sup>68</sup> "The greatest striving of the Mind, and its greatest virtue is understanding things by the third kind of knowledge" (VP24).

<sup>69</sup> Knowledge of God, i.e. knowledge of the third kind, is the highest satisfaction of the Mind (see VP25 and VP27): "Since all things are in God and are conceived through God, it follows that we can deduce from this knowledge a

[IV.] In addition to these two kinds of knowledge, there is (as I shall show in what follows) another, third kind, which we shall call intuitive knowledge. And this kind of knowing proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the [NS: formal]<sup>70</sup> essence of things.<sup>71</sup>

It should now be clear why the detailed exploration of the concept of essence in the first part of this paper was necessary. The interpretation of essence presented earlier aims to make sense not only of what is meant by knowledge of the third kind (and its object), but also of the passages in Part V that continually confound readers of Spinoza, particularly those on blessedness, freedom and the eternal part of the Mind. Moreover, any account of essences that remains faithful to his metaphysics will be directly reflected in a subsequent reading of Spinoza's epistemology and consequently, his ethical project, given the intricate interrelatedness of these domains in his work. A true investigation of essence in the complete sense and its relation to the third kind of knowledge is, in fact, a discussion of how to achieve blessedness and, to some extent, about the eternal part of the Mind such as it is considered in Part V. In the next and final section, I will

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great many things which we know adequately, and so can form that third kind of knowledge of which we spoke in P40S2 and of whose excellence and utility we shall speak in Part V" (IIP47S).

<sup>70</sup> This is a crucial point to note. The bracketed addition from the NS translator was not in Spinoza's original Latin text – see Gebhardt II/182. The Latin text reads: "*Atque hoc cognoscendi genus procedit ab adaequata idea essentiae formalis quorundam Dei attributorum ad adaequatam cognitionem essentiae rerum.*" Based on my reading of essences, it is problematic to restrict knowledge of the third kind to the formal essence of a singular thing – it is, instead, knowledge of the essence in a complete sense of a singular thing. In defense of my reading, VP25D reads "The third kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things..." (notably lacking the translator's addition). This idea is further supported by the description of the free man in the final propositions of Part IV, who clearly does not act only with knowledge of essences of things *sub specie aeternitatis*, given the virtue of cooperation and the wise man's usefulness to other wise men ("man is a God to man" IVP35S). For an interesting take on Spinoza's free man, see Garber (2004 and 2005). See also IIP45S and IP24C regarding formal essences; the consequence of these suggest a severe lack of practical use of knowledge of formal essences *in themselves* that seem to directly contradict the practicality of rational men who strive to become more free.

<sup>71</sup> "I shall explain all these with one example. Suppose there are three numbers, and the problem is to find a fourth which is to the third as the second is to the first. Merchants do not hesitate to multiply the second by the third, and divide the produce by the first, because they have not yet forgotten what they heard from their teacher without any demonstration, or because they have often found this in the simplest numbers, or from the force of the Demonstration of P7 in Bk. VII of Euclid, viz. from the common property of proportionals. But in the simplest numbers none of this is necessary. Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is 6 – and we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second" (IIP40S2).

give an account of how this all ties together as a prescription for the most virtuous - i.e. most free - life.

### **On *Beatitudo***

*Blessedness is not the reward of virtue, but virtue itself; nor do we enjoy it because we restrain our lusts; on the contrary, because we enjoy it, we are able to restrain them.*  
(VP42)

In this section, I will give an account of how applying the understanding of essences and knowledge as discussed above leads the philosopher to a life of blessedness (*beatitudo*<sup>72</sup>).

Blessedness as the object of this ethical endeavor is clear from the Preface to Part V, which reads: “Here, then, I shall treat of the power of reason, showing what it can do against the affects, and what Freedom of Mind, *or* blessedness is.”<sup>73</sup> I will discuss how this knowledge makes sense of the claim that “the human Mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the Body, but something of it remains which is eternal.”<sup>74</sup> This is indeed what we understand by salvation. The upshot, and conclusion, is that this highest satisfaction of the Mind, blessedness, is not the result of a life of contemplation alone, but a result of the right principles of living.

In order to show that knowledge of the third kind, i.e., knowledge that brings the greatest satisfaction of the Mind, has as its object the essences in a complete sense of singular things, it will benefit us to look first at several propositions in the text, which when brought together, give a strong defense of this reading:

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<sup>72</sup> Curley notes in the Glossary-Index: “Sometimes *beatitudo* and its cognates clearly have the religious connotations suggested by *blessedness*, but it can equally mean *happiness*.”

<sup>73</sup> “...Here, then, as I have said, I shall treat only of the power of the Mind, *or* of reason, and shall show above all, how great its dominion over the affects is, and what kind of dominion it has for restraining and moderating them. For we have already demonstrated above that it does not have an absolute dominion over them... Therefore, because the power of the Mind is defined only by understanding, as I have shown above, we shall determine, by the Mind’s knowledge alone, the remedies for the affects. I believe everyone in fact knows them by experience, though they neither observe them accurately, nor see them distinctly. From that we shall deduce all those things which concern the Mind’s blessedness” (Preface to PV).

<sup>74</sup> VP23

“Knowledge of God is the Mind’s greatest good; its greatest virtue is to know God” (IVP28);

“The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God” (VP24);

“The greatest striving of the Mind, and its greatest virtue is understanding things by the third kind of knowledge.

“Dem.: The third kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things, and the more we understand things in this way, the more we understand God” (VP25);

From these propositions, we can piece together how adequate knowledge of the essences of singular things<sup>75</sup> leads to knowledge of God (VP24) – which we know to be necessarily adequate<sup>76</sup> – and it is this knowledge that is called ‘intuitive knowledge,’ or knowledge of the third kind. This knowledge is indeed the greatest striving of the Mind (VP25), i.e. knowledge of God is the Mind’s highest virtue. We know that knowledge of the essences of singular things involves both the actual and formal essences because: 1. “the third kind of knowledge depends on the Mind, as on a formal cause, insofar as the Mind itself is eternal,” (VP31) i.e., a thing’s formal essence, and 2. by VP24 (above) in light of IVP4 – “it is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone” - i.e. a thing’s actual essence. It is the part of the Mind that is occupied with God or eternity, i.e. is constituted by adequate ideas, that remains after the Body perishes.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, intuitive knowledge is adequate knowledge of *essentiae rerum*, and is the key to achieving *beatitudo*,<sup>78</sup> to leading a life of virtue.

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<sup>75</sup> In further defense of my reading of actual and formal essences as constituting together the essence in the complete sense of singular things, see VP29S: “We conceive things as **actual** in two ways: either insofar as we conceive them to exist in relation to a certain time and place,” - (emphasis mine) - “or insofar as we conceive them to be contained in God and to follow from the necessity of the divine nature. But the things we conceive in this second way as true, *or* real, we conceive under a gaze of eternity, and to that extent they involve the eternal and infinite essence of God.”

<sup>76</sup> IIP32

<sup>77</sup> VP23

<sup>78</sup> “From this we clearly understand wherein our salvation, *or* blessedness, *or* Freedom, consists, viz. in a constant and eternal Love of God... Again, because the essence of our Mind consists only in knowledge, of which God is the beginning and the foundation (by IP15 and IIP47S), it is clear to us how our Mind, with respect to both essence and existence, follows from the divine nature, and continually depends on God. I thought this worth the trouble of noting here, in order to show by this example how much the knowledge of singular things I have called intuitive, *or* knowledge of the third kind (see IIP20S2), can accomplish, and how much more powerful it is than the universal

That the highest good of the Mind cannot find its complete conclusion in contemplation alone is clear on two fronts: first, it is stated explicitly in Part V, albeit buried in one of Spinoza's infamous scholia; and secondly, it can be surmised by way of IIP7. In regards to the first point:

The best thing, then, that we can do, so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects, is to conceive a correct principle of living, *or* sure maxims of life, to commit them to memory, and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life...But in order that we may always have this rule of reason ready when it is needed, we ought to think about and meditate frequently on the common wrongs of men...If we have ready also the principle of our own true advantage, and also of the good which follows from mutual friendship and common society, and keep in mind, moreover, that the highest satisfaction of mind stems from the right principle of living (by IVP52)...then the wrong, *or* the Hate usually arising from it, will occupy a very small part of the imagination, and will easily be overcome. (VP10S)

Spinoza has stated explicitly that 'the highest satisfaction of mind stems from the right principle of living;' and it is clear from this that blessedness is not merely a life of contemplation. Right principles of living are equated (*sive*) with sure maxims of life, one of which is that "Hate is to be conquered by Love, *or* Nobility, not by repaying it with Hate in return" (VP10S). The highest satisfaction of the Mind is therefore not limited to understanding, i.e., the obtaining of adequate ideas or 'actions of the Mind', which occur only under the attribute of thought. Love, indeed all actions of the Mind, must have a correlate in actions of the Body. This is exactly the second point regarding contemplation by itself as insufficient for the highest good of the Mind. By IIP7, we understand that there must be a correlate of any thing under the attribute of thought in the attribute of extension and vice versa.<sup>79</sup> From this we can conclude that the pursuit of the highest good by the Mind under the attribute of thought has a correlate under the attribute of extension. It

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knowledge I have called knowledge of the second kind. For although I have shown generally in Part I that all things (and consequently the human Mind also) depend on God both for their essence and their existence, nevertheless, that demonstration, though legitimate and put beyond all chance of doubt, still does not affect our Mind as much as when this is inferred from the very essence of any singular thing which we say depends on God" (VP36S).

<sup>79</sup> "For example, a circle existing in nature and the idea of the existing circle, which is also in God, are one and the same thing, which is explained through different attributes. Therefore, whether we conceive nature under the attribute of Extension, or under the attribute of Thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order, *or* one and the same connection of causes, i.e., that the same things follow one another" (IIP7S).

is this, I argue, that constitutes the right principles of living, or sure maxims of life, which are in fact a manner of acting. Adequate ideas that constitute a Mind increase a thing's power of acting, i.e. virtue, and therefore its actions of the Mind and actions of the Body will be more self-determined *or* more virtuous. Quite simply, adequate ideas lead to virtue, both in thought and in action.

The reason for understanding the right principles of living as a manner of acting,<sup>80</sup> i.e., acting virtuously<sup>81</sup> under both the attribute of thought and the attribute of extension, is perhaps most strongly defended by a proper understanding of what constitutes knowledge of the third kind, i.e. intuitive knowledge.<sup>82</sup> If one accepts my reading of the *Ethics*, and therefore my interpretation of the concept of essence – particularly essence in the complete sense – it should be clear that the object of intuitive knowledge is knowledge of the nature of singular things, which necessarily involves their situation in Nature<sup>83</sup> while simultaneously attending to their existence as an idea in God.<sup>84</sup> Spinoza affirms the possibility of this in VP14: “The Mind can bring it about that all of the Body's affections, *or* images of things, are related to the idea of God.” Moreover, it is clear that reason, insofar as it understood as knowledge of the second

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<sup>80</sup> For indeed we must understand the correlate of adequate knowledge in the finite intellect, i.e. ‘the actions of the Mind,’ under the attribute of extension as active affects, i.e. actions of the Body, rather than as passions, since by IIP3 we know that “the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone.”

<sup>81</sup> “Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living, and preserving our being (these three signify the same thing) by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage” (IVP24).

<sup>82</sup> Though far be it from me to state definitively that such an understanding is possible, given the general uncertainty that surrounds knowledge of the third kind in secondary literature on Spinoza. Nadler writes: “Both of these definitions are frustratingly spare, and Spinoza does little to spell out in detail what exactly each of these two kinds of knowledge involves. Knowledge of the third kind, in particular seems rather mysterious, and has often given rise to the suggestion that Spinoza is ultimately a kind of mystic” (Nadler 2006, p. 178). However, I believe adequate understanding of the concept of essence is key grasping what should be understood by knowledge of the third kind, and suggestions that Spinoza is a mystic, at least insofar as they refer to this point alone, are misguided.

<sup>83</sup> See IVP2 and IVP4.

<sup>84</sup> “From what we have said, we easily conceive what clear and distinct knowledge – and especially that third kind of knowledge (see IIP47S), **whose foundation is the knowledge of God itself** – can accomplish against the affects” (VP20S, emphasis mine).

kind<sup>85</sup> cannot by itself give us knowledge of the essences of singular things: “What is common to all things (on this see L2, above) and is equally in the part and in the whole, does not constitute the essence of any singular thing” (IIP37). Knowledge of the affects - and therefore of modes as they relate to and are the cause of other modes - is essential to intuitive knowledge, and consequently essential to blessedness.<sup>86</sup> The doctrine of knowledge of the third kind does indeed give us an ethics of living.

The consequence of this now reveals itself in the *Ethics*, and can be understood as the aim of the project of this rigorous work: the manner of acting under the attribute of extension that is the correlate of the highest striving of the Mind is living a virtuous life. The virtuous life necessarily involves the interactions, causal relations, and affects between modes. This leads to the description of the free man at the end of Part IV: the free man cooperates with others, he is honest, capable of avoiding danger to his being, he wants virtue (and consequently freedom) for other men, and his striving is by the dictate of reason, which is to say, he lives by those right principles of living as they were identified above.<sup>87</sup> We have seen from VP36S that freedom is nothing other than salvation, and so the free man is the man of blessedness, the true philosopher, where to be a philosopher is not only to think but also to *live* in a certain way.

## Conclusion

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<sup>85</sup> IIP40S2

<sup>86</sup> “He who understands himself and his affects clearly and distinctly loves God, and does so the more, the more he understands himself and his affects” (VP15).

<sup>87</sup> “Only free men are very thankful to one another” (IVP71); “A free man always acts honestly, not deceptively” (IVP72); “A man who is guided by reason is more free in a state, where he lives according to a common decision, than in solitude, where he obeys only himself” (IVP73); “the virtue of a free man is seen to be as great in avoiding dangers as in overcoming them” (IVP69); “a free man thinks of nothing less than of death” (IVP67); “he who lives according to the guidance of reason strives, as far as he can, to repay the other’s Hate, Anger, and Disdain toward him, with Love, *or* Nobility” (IVP46); “the good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he desires for other men; and this Desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater” (IVP34); “there is no singular thing in Nature that is more useful to man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason” (IVP35C1, see also IVP35C2).

At the outset of this project, it was not clear how an ethical or moral system could arise from so abstract a metaphysics. The rigor that must be applied when reading the *Ethics* makes this work potentially inaccessible and incoherent to many. However, if one follows along carefully and attentively, the delicate and transforming aim of the *Ethics* can be reached. Adequately understanding the essences of things gives us knowledge of causes and affections; such knowledge grants a greater power of acting. This power of self-determinacy means we can act in our own interest, and this knowledge helps us see that nothing is more useful to a free man than other free men. For this reason, as we become more virtuous, we desire freedom for all men, and we seek to join together to promote the freedom of all. This power brings happiness. This is the foundation of the Spinozistic ethical - and clearly political - project.

Despite the abstract and highly complex nature of the *Ethics* and the metaphysical, epistemological and psychological accounts it provides, its project is a practical one: it is an account of *how one ought to live*. The *Ethics* provides a truly moral project that explores the virtuous life, i.e. the free life, and its description of the process of striving for blessedness *or* salvation is entrenched in the metaphysics it emerges from: Indeed, I assert that a proper understanding of the *Ethics* must consider the work as a whole, and any attempt to compartmentalize the rigorous arguments presented in the geometrical style will throw the reader from the larger picture. The ethical life, the virtuous life, the truly Spinozistic life, is a life of the Mind as much and as necessarily as a life of the Body. Adequate ideas, sure maxims of life, are expressed in a manner of thinking *and* of acting – and it is this that constitutes the virtue of a thing. The true philosopher is a man of blessed thoughts and of blessed actions. Here we find salvation.

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