

Spinoza on the Association of Affects and the Workings of the Human Mind

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Part 3 of Spinoza's *Ethics* has typically drawn scholarly attention because of the claim of E3p7 that the *conatus* of a thing constitutes its essence and the taxonomy of the affects presented in it and compiled at the end in the *Definition of the Affects*. While these elements of Part 3 are clearly important, this chapter concerns a set of propositions in *Ethics* Part 3 that are often overlooked. These propositions lay out some details of the workings of the human mind, how we imagine particular objects and how we begin to reason, that is, to relate objects to one another, whether that be through resemblance, temporally or causally, expanding our understanding from how things affect us to how things relate to one another. In particular, E3p12 and E3p13 concern how our attention focuses on objects. E3p14 begins a series of propositions that detail ways in which we associate our imaginations of things, and in particular the role resemblance plays. E3p18 concerns how we relate objects in time through affective responses. E3p19-p24 outline the basic infrastructure of the ways in which our affective responses allow us to draw inferences about causal relations.

There are at least three lines of approach to this set of propositions. First, we might articulate how they impact the account of human interaction, social relationships and the account of good that follows in Part 4 of *Ethics*, shedding light on the role of the affects in Spinoza's moral, social and political philosophy.¹ Second, we might consider how Spinoza's account of the associative mechanisms of the human mind compares with another familiar figure who understands human thought in terms of principles of association guiding the imagination: David Hume, shedding light on the development of naturalist accounts of

¹ For scholars who draw attention to this aspect of Spinoza's thought see James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Religion and Politics* and "Freedom, Slavery and the Passions;" Rosenthal, "Persuasive Passions;" Kisner, "Perfection and Desire" and "Spinoza's Virtuous Passions;" the essays in Kisner and Youpa, *Spinoza's Ethical Theory*; and LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom*.

thought.² However, each of these two options simply take the claims Spinoza makes about the associations in the imagination for granted without asking how they fit into his account of the human mind. This third line of approach is the one I will pursue here. In particular, I will be concerned to elucidate both what the basis is for Spinoza's claims about our imaginative associations and what the principles of association Spinoza articulates tell us about his account of human understanding.

Regarding the basis of Spinoza's claims, it is worth noting that while there may be connections between Hume's principles of association and Spinoza's, Hume's appeal to three principles of association guiding the movement of the imagination -- resemblance, contiguity in space and time, and cause and effect -- is an empirical claim, grounded in observations of movements of thought resulting in an inductively supported generalization. Spinoza, while certainly an astute observer of human activity of various sorts, privileges rational and intuitive knowledge over empirically grounded generalizations (E2p40s2). Assuming that the *Ethics* aims to be either an exercise of reason or the articulation of intuitive knowledge, Spinoza's claims about the workings of the imagination need to follow from the metaphysics and account of human nature set out earlier in the work.

In this chapter I offer a close reading of the propositions E3p12-p24. Doing so requires setting out a bit of background, and so I begin by briefly laying out the key relevant elements of the Spinozist system: *conatus*, imagination, and the primary affects. The questions that emerge in considering these elements of the Spinozist system will help frame my discussion of the propositions at issue. I then turn to offer an interpretation that shows how propositions E3p16-p24 constitute Spinoza's account of the workings of the human mind,

² See Klever, "Hume Contra Spinoza?" and "More About Hume's Debt to Spinoza." Popkin, "Hume and Spinoza" and Neu, *Emotion, Thought and Therapy* concern various points of comparison between Hume and Spinoza, if not this particular one.

and in particular, of how the mind works to move us from ideas of the way we are affected by things to ideas of objects in relation to one another. The propositions with which I am concerned also begin the process of enumerating other affects in the taxonomy, including love, hatred, vacillation, hope, fear, confidence, despair, gladness, remorse, pity, favor and indignation, and I will conclude by suggesting that these propositions also show how, for Spinoza, epistemology is ultimately subordinated to his moral psychology and ethics.

1. Some preliminaries: Conatus, imagination, the primary affects, and two puzzles

The propositions with which I am concerned depend centrally on the primary affects -- joy, sadness and desire -- and these affects derive directly from *conatus*, the striving of each thing, insofar as it can by its own power, to persevere in being what it is (E3p6), and the further claim in E3p7 that this "striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing." So to understand these propositions, we need to first understand *conatus* and, then, its relation to the primary affects. However, in order to understand *conatus*, we will need to understand Spinoza's notion of imagination; imagination also plays a central role in E3p12-p24, and so while I will introduce Spinoza's account here, more will be said in the next section.

It is perhaps most straightforward to understand the claim of E3p7 that a thing's *conatus* constitutes its essence by conceiving of Nature as extended, and so of things as bodies. As Nature does its thing, that is, natures, (to follow Spinoza in turning 'nature' into a verb form in E1p29 | GII 71), parts of nature, that is, particular bodies, causally interact. As Spinoza outlines in the short excursus on physics in Part 2 of the *Ethics*, those interactions result in an array of regions, where within the constant change that characterizes an infinite causal chain, there is nonetheless some structural stability. Within these regions, though particular parts of extended substance may change, though the relative sizes of the parts may

change, though the movement of the parts may shift direction, the proportion, or *ratio*, of the motion and rest among the bodies in the remains the same.³ Furthermore, Spinoza asserts, so long as this *ratio* remains the same, the particular body "will retain its nature, as before, without any change in its form" (E2L4, E2L5, E2L6 | GII 100-101). Insofar as a body's *ratio* is preserved, that particular body continues to exist as the particular body it is, and so it makes sense to consider the *ratio* as constitutive of a particular body. Spinoza's claim in E3p7 then is simply that its striving to maintain its *ratio* is the essence of a body. A body can fail to persevere, in which case it will cease to exist and become something else, with a different *ratio*, which will then strive to maintain that new *ratio*, until that proportion of motion and rest is also compromised, and so on.⁴

In E2p7 Spinoza articulates what is often referred to as a principle of parallelism: "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things." The demands of parallelism require a mental equivalent to the concept of *ratio* as it applies to bodies. *Conatus*, or the essence of a thing as it is introduced in E3p6 through E3p8, is a wholly general concept; it applies to each singular thing, irrespective of the attribute under which it is conceived. However, in E3p9, *conatus* is expressly applied to the mind:

Both insofar as the mind has clear and distinct ideas, and insofar as it has confused ideas, it strives [*conatur*], for an indefinite duration, to preserve [itself] in its being [*in*

³ See Lemmas 5-7 | GII 100-101.

⁴ Understanding *conatus*, and its relation to the notion of *ratio*, is no small interpretive matter, and here I am simply assuming a reading which deflates any apparent teleology. That is, I take it that the sense of essence in play does not involve any appeal to a function or purpose. It can be useful to think of particular things as akin to eddies in a stream. The water in the stream continues its flow down stream, but the pattern of motion of the water creates a steady state, an eddy. The eddy will remain even though the water of the eddy is constantly changing, just so long as the pattern of motion is preserved. If something disrupts that motion, say, a rock falls into the water, the eddy will disappear. This sort of interpretation aligns with that offered in Carriero, "Spinoza on Final Causality" and "Conatus and Perfection in Spinoza." See also Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument" and "Spinoza's Theory of Metaphysical Individuation."

suo esse per severare] and it is conscious of this striving it has [*hujus sui conatus est conscia*].

(G II 147)

The proposition highlights two features of the *conatus* or striving proper to the human mind. First, it is in virtue of both the clear and distinct and the confused ideas constituting a human mind that the mind strives to persevere. Second, the *conatus* of the human mind entails consciousness of itself.

The presupposition of E3p9 that the human mind is constituted by both clear and distinct and confused ideas, as the demonstration makes clear, draws attention to the fact that both adequate and inadequate ideas figure in the human mind. An adequate idea, as defined in E2d4, is a true idea insofar as it is considered in itself -- that is, to comprehend it fully, one need only consider the idea itself, and not any other idea external to it. In E2p38 and E2p38c, Spinoza identifies ideas, or notions, that are common to all as adequate ideas,⁵ and presumably we can take it that the human mind contains adequate ideas insofar as it contains these common notions. I will not have more to say about this aspect of the human mind. An inadequate idea, by contrast, does not contain in itself the conditions of its own truth. The explication of its content depends on that of other ideas, and insofar as the chain of logical dependencies between ideas are as infinite as the chain of causal dependencies of finite bodies (E1p28), that explication may be necessarily incomplete. Imaginations are perhaps the paradigm case of inadequate ideas, and so to understand why inadequate ideas figure in the human mind we need to understand imagination.

Spinoza defines terms 'image' and its mental counterpart 'imagine' in E2p17s fleshing out the content of the proposition itself, which concerns the way in which the human mind takes external bodies causally impacting the human body as existing, or as present to it.

⁵ It is not clear whether there are any other ideas he takes to be conceived adequately by the human mind.

When external bodies appear to the mind -- when the mind is presented with bodies external to it as existing -- the mind, in Spinoza's terms, imagines. I will call these appearances or presentations 'imagination' or 'imaginings'. The bodily affections corresponding to those imaginings are termed 'images'.⁶

Our imaginations, while they present external bodies to us, are not to be understood as verisimilar or veridical representations of bodies external to us. Rather, they are quite simply how things appear to us. In Spinoza's system, there are two distinct senses in which we can say that an idea has an object. First, there is a metaphysical sense grounded in Spinoza's parallelism, which aligns the conceptions of a thing under the attribute of thought and under the attribute of extension. The metaphysical object of the idea constituting the essence of a thing is just that thing conceived under the attribute of extension.⁷ Second, there is an epistemic sense of the object of an idea. Spinoza clearly recognizes this distinction between the metaphysical and epistemic objects of an idea in his discussion of the idea of Peter in E2p17s:

we clearly understand the difference between the idea of, say, Peter, which constitutes the essence of Peter's mind, and the idea of Peter which is in another man, say in Paul. For the former directly explains the essence of Peter's body, and does not involve existence, except so long as Peter exists; but the latter indicates the condition of Paul's body more than Peter's nature and therefore which that condition of Paul's body lasts, Paul's mind will still regard Peter as present to itself, even though Peter does not exist. (GII 105-106)

⁶ See GII 106.

⁷ It is this sense of 'object' that figures in the claim of E2p13 that "the object of the idea [*objectum ideae*] constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else" (GII 96). Insofar as Spinoza himself uses the term *objectum* only in this sense, we might well say that this is the proper sense of the object of an idea for him.

The idea of Peter that constitutes the essence of Peter's mind is just Peter's body, what I am calling the metaphysical object of the idea of Peter. The sense in which Paul's idea is of Peter, is, however, entirely different. Paul's idea of Peter is a matter of the way in which Peter is presented to Paul's mind as present. That is, the object of Paul's idea of Peter is what Paul represents Peter to be, or Paul's imagination of Peter.

If our imaginations were wholly veridical or adequate, the object of our imagination, the epistemic object of an idea, would be identical with its metaphysical object. This, however, is not the case. This presentation of Peter in Paul's mind is due less to Peter's essence than to the way in which Paul finds himself affected.⁸ As Spinoza takes himself to have demonstrated in E2p16c1 and E2p16c2, the human mind perceives bodies insofar as its body, the idea of which constitutes its essence, is affected by the bodies around it, but in perceiving those bodies our ideas of them "indicate the condition of our own body [*nostris corporis constitutionem*] more than the nature of the external bodies" (GII 104) Through the ways in which bodies impact our own body, we do not perceive the natures of things. Rather, in perceiving as present the things we do, we perceive more the condition of our own body. To put this point in terms of imagination, our imaginations, in presenting us with objects, represent the way that the condition of our body is affected by causal interactions with things external to us. I will discuss this matter further in the next section.

Let me now turn to the second claim of E3p9, that the mind is conscious of its own striving or *conatus*. It is challenging to understand just what Spinoza intends by this claim, and it is made more puzzling by the scholium to the proposition. There, Spinoza distinguishes between will and appetite. Will is this striving referred to the mind alone; whereas the

⁸ See Garrett, "Representation, Misrepresentation and Error" for further discussion.

appetite is referred to mind and body together. Of particular interest is appetite.⁹ As Spinoza understands it, appetite is "the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follows those things that promote his preservation" (GII 147). Our appetites serve our self-preservation, and clearly pertain to our bodily needs and the mental manifestation of those needs. Our appetite just is our striving to persevere as the things we are, and so is our essence. Insofar as appetite is this striving, we should by E3p9, be conscious of it. Plausibly, insofar as our appetites move us to act to satisfy those appetites, we are conscious of them. The puzzle comes with Spinoza's last point of clarification, of the distinction between appetite and desire:

Between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious [*conscii*] of their appetite. So *desire* can be defined as *Appetite together with consciousness of the appetite*. [*Cupiditas est appetitus cum ejusdem conscientia.*](GII 148)

Here, it can seem that Spinoza is maintaining that appetite is not conscious, whereas desire is, and, in particular, is a consciousness of appetite. And this, of course, would seem to undercut the original claim of the proposition, that the human mind is conscious of its striving to persevere in its being. This leaves us with a question of how Spinoza can distinguish between appetite and desire and adhere to the proposition he is discussing.

I want here to suggest an answer to this puzzle. This answer is provisional; however, it also accords with the interpretation I will develop of the propositions that follow in the next section. It is important to note that Spinoza here uses two distinct, though, closely related terms: *conscius* and *conscientia*. The former term is repeated in the proposition, its

⁹ Presumably, we will what we do consciously, and in this way are conscious of our striving. More needs to be said regarding the way the will is directed and our consciousness of that directedness, and its reference to only the mind. As will soon become clear, the focus of the discussion of this chapter does not require this be developed.

demonstration and scholium, but the latter term is only used in the definition of desire.

Conscious connotes a knowledge, that is, an awareness, of good and evil. I take the use of that term in this proposition to indicate that *conatus* -- striving to persevere in one's being -- in humans provides the direction which serves to distinguish good and evil *for us*. Insofar as its *conatus* is the actual essence of it as a thing, the human mind has an innate awareness (or knowledge) of good and evil -- it is conscious of its own striving to persevere. This point applies to both will and appetite. Desire, however, involves *conscientia*. *Conscientia* also involves an awareness of good and evil, but that awareness is articulated, or, we might say, it involves a self-awareness of our awareness of a thing as good. So when I have an appetite for an apple, I am aware of *an apple* insofar as it is good for me and I am moved towards eating the apple. When I desire an apple, I not only am aware of an apple and moved towards it, but I also am aware of my awareness of the apple insofar as it is good for me, for in desiring it I affirm the apple is good and direct myself towards it.¹⁰

Now, though desire is presented one of the primary affects, it, interestingly, does not figure in the E3p12-p24. I will return to this point towards the end of my discussion, as it seems to me that an important aspect of the relationship that emerges between joy and love, and sadness and hatred, in those propositions runs parallel to the relation I am suggesting there is between appetite and desire.¹¹ Before considering those propositions, however, we now need to turn to joy and sadness, the primary affects central to those propositions.

Insofar as E3p9 begins to provide us with an explanation of *conatus* within the domain of the mental, that is, of *conatus* as that striving of the human mind to preserve itself

¹⁰ For more detailed discussions of Spinoza's account of consciousness see Nadler, "Spinoza and Consciousness," Garrett, "Representation and Consciousness," LeBuffe, "Theories about Consciousness," and Marshall, *The Spiritual Automaton*. These accounts focus on how Spinoza conceives of consciousness, and its relation to thought. Though my view is aligned with Garrett and Marshall, my concern is to draw out what follows about Spinoza's account of reasoning -- understood as the relations of ideas -- given that he takes us to affectively represent things as present.

¹¹ For an interesting discussion of appetite and desire, see Steinberg, "Affects, Desire and Motivation."

in existence, then it also affords us the mental concept that stands in parallel to the bodily concept of *ratio*. The theory of the primary affects articulated in E3p11s provides this mental equivalent of homeostatic stability of a physical thing. This is clear from the demonstration of 3p11 which appeals to E2p7 and E2p14 (the proposition which translates the physics that immediately precedes it into mental terms, asserting that "the human mind is capable of perceiving a great many things, and is the more capable, the more its body can be disposed in a great many ways). And the proposition E3p11 itself draws a parallel between increases and decreases in the body's power of acting (i.e., maintaining itself in existence) and increases and decreases in the power of thinking. In the scholium, joy and sadness are defined as passions that reflect, respectively, the mind's increasing power to persevere (passing to a greater perfection) or decreasing power to persevere (passing to a lesser perfection).

So, in so far as we strive to persevere in our being, we have an appetite, and in so far as we are aware of that appetite, we desire. Insofar as by nature we have a drive to continue in existence, we will naturally aim to increase our ability to succeed in that drive. That is, by nature we will strive to increase joy and decrease sadness. Do we feel joy and sadness because of our increased power? Or are joy and sadness simply the mental form of increased power? Are joy and sadness mere feelings, or do they, like all mental states for Spinoza, have an object? That is, how are we to understand joy and sadness within Spinoza's account?

In this section, I have sketched out a number of central concepts within Spinoza's account of the human mind. First, for Spinoza, *conatus* or that striving to persevere constituting the essence of a thing, applies to thing conceived under the attribute of thought, or a mind, just as much as it applies to a body. In Spinoza's explication of that concept as it applies to a human mind, he distinguishes two aspects: that a human mind comprises both

adequate and inadequate ideas, and that it includes an awareness of its striving. Imaginations figure centrally with respect to the first aspect, as they are paradigmatic inadequate ideas: our imaginations are the way in which things appear to us in virtue of the way in which we are affected by them. The second aspect, our consciousness of our striving, leads to the introduction of appetite and desire, as well as of joy and sadness, as central to the human mind. But with these introductions come questions: In what sense are we aware of our appetites? How are appetites distinguished from desire in virtue of our awareness? Equally, what are we aware of in being affected with joy and sadness? Are these affects representational? These questions effectively concern just what consciousness consists in for Spinoza, and how consciousness connects with our representation, and so knowledge of the world around us. With this background in place, we are now in a position to examine E3p12-13.

2. Imaginative Attention, Affective Association and the Workings of the Human Mind

In this section, I proceed by offering a close reading of propositions E3p12-p24. While this interpretive strategy is somewhat flatfooted, these propositions are vexing, and this mode of presentation allows how these propositions build on one another to come into view. Spinoza begins in E3p12-13 presenting a picture of the ways in which we are affected by things is tied to our imagining and attending to the objects we do. E3p14 and p15 further clarify this picture but also highlight questions about joy and sadness. Subsequent propositions address those questions by articulating the role those affects play in our imagining more objects and then in relating those imaginings to one another. E3p16 and p17 show how similarities in how we are affected contribute to our imagination of objects,

including the variability of our imagination. E3p18 demonstrates how we relate imagined objects to one another through the ways we are affected, and E3p19-p24 focuses on how the way we are affected allows us to relate imagined objects to one another causally.

2.1 Attention and Imagination

In E3p12 and E3p13, Spinoza explains how our attention becomes focused on one object rather than another. We "strive to imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting" (E3p12) and to avoid "imagining those things that diminish or restrain its or the body's power of acting" (E3p13c). We do so by recollecting or calling to mind those things that contribute to our continued existence or that preclude the existence of what undermines our continued to existence.¹²

What is it to focus attention on one object or another? One natural way to think of focusing attention is as the mind's honing in on an idea that already exists, fully formed, in our mind. We assume that our mind is well-furnished with ideas that correspond to the infinite ways in which our body is affected by the things external to it. Under this assumption, E3p12 and p13 posit that we hone in on those ideas insofar as their objects make our body more resilient and ignore those that undermine resilience, that is, we hone in on those ideas of things most conducive to our persevering, or self-preservation. On this, account we have the ideas in mind before we are affected by things. Insofar as things do affect us, we are drawn to the ideas we already have. I will refer to this as the Ideas Before Affects interpretation.

There is something common-sensical about this way of thinking, but it does not do justice to Spinoza's appeal to imagination in E3p12 and p13. As noted in the previous section, imaginations consist in the way in which the way external things impact our bodily

¹² Carriero, "Conatus and Perfection" discusses these propositions, but towards a different end, that of better understanding *conatus*.

state is realized in consciousness. For Spinoza, imagination is quite simply the way things appear to us as existing, for them to be presented as present to us.

We can see Spinoza's concern with how our attention is focused in these propositions as his effort to explain not how we hone in on the ideas we do, but rather how things appear to us as they do, that is, how we imagine what we do. And his explanation is that things *appear* as they do -- we perceive the objects we do -- in accordance with how external things are conducive to our persevering. What it is to focus attention on this reading is to organize or conceptualize the manifold of causal impacts on our body in a particular way.¹³ I will refer to this as the Affective Imagination interpretation.¹⁴

The scholium to E3p13 not only helps to elucidate the differences in the interpretations but also brings out wherein the issue between them lies. For according to the Scholium, this proposition (and presumably the one prior) is supposed to help us understand just what love and hate are. Spinoza defines love as "joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause" and hatred as "sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause" (GII 151). What seems to distinguish love and hatred from the affects of joy and sadness is simply their coming with the idea of an external cause. On the face of it, this seems most in line with the first interpretation, insofar as it would seem to imply that love is an affective attitude towards an already existing idea, which, through that affective attitude, is brought to our attention. However, the second interpretation also makes sense. For we can take what it is to love to be to want present the object of love, that is, to imagine it. What it is to hate something is to want to destroy it, that is to imagine things that exclude its existence. On this

¹³ I discuss this view in more detail in Shapiro, "Passionate Perception" and "Spinoza on Imagination and the Affects."

¹⁴ There is also a third sort of account, one that I will not give much weight to here. Interpreters have often taken Spinoza to take the affects as evaluative judgements. On this line, loving one's neighbor would be a judgement that one's neighbor was good. The issue with this line of interpretation is that intellectualizes the affects, masking the way that the affects arise through our causal connections to the world.

reading, love or hatred, as an affect (joy or sadness) with an imagination of an object, can be understood as an affectively formed imagination. We take the object we do as present to us in virtue of the joy it brings us. The question that comes to the fore in trying to decide between these two interpretations concerns the relation between joy and love, or sadness and hate. Is joy (or sadness) itself an objectless feeling, looking to attach to an object? If so, the Ideas Before Affect interpretation makes more sense. Or is joy (or sadness) something else, a particular kind of affect (an idea, and so representational) that shapes the way things appear to us, what we imagine to exist? This alternative is more aligned with Affective Imagination interpretation. But if this latter interpretation is correct, it also raises a further question about the nature of joy (or sadness) and how it is distinct from love (or sadness from hatred). In what way are joy and sadness representational? And how is that distinct from having an object appear to us as existing? As we will see, similar questions arise in the propositions that follow concerning the ways in which we associate imaginings.

2.2 Associations of Affects: questions about joy and sadness

E3p14 is at once both commonsensical and confusing. It articulates the commonsense position that we naturally form affective associations in our experience, and these associations then inform our interactions with the world going forward. Many a screwball romantic comedy is driven by the premise that if someone feels both love and anger together, she will continue to feel those two emotions in concert. A child's initial experiences of surprise may come with either fear or joy, and one can easily imagine that he will grow up to be either a recluse or an adventurer depending on which it is. The demonstration, on the other hand, is confusing. Spinoza attributes this association of affects to associations of imaginings -- when we are thinking of one object, we move to think of another. It is not clear, however, why associations of ideas of objects should demand an

association of affects. Certainly, on the Ideas before Affects interpretation it is clear we often change our feelings about objects: Liking a classmate one day, despising him the next; fearing dogs as a child, loving a pet dog as an adult, and so on. If a student thinks of her classmate, with which affect will it be? What will be the associated idea with that feeling? Will the same idea be associated with the opposing feeling?

Spinoza's demonstration appeals to the proposition that leads directly to his introduction of imagination: E2p16c2, and noting that our imaginations "indicate the affects of our body more than the nature of external bodies."¹⁵ Apparently, this fact alone is sufficient to derive the proposition. If we are affected simultaneously by two distinct affects, we will thereafter associate them. The point here is that so long as we remain essentially the same being, we will continue to be affected by external things in the same way. Thus, when we experience one affect, our body will be in a state that is conducive to the other affect. But the implication is that the association between our imaginations is a matter of the association of affects, and that is because the way we are affected is constitutive of our imagination. So, while the proposition itself is consistent with the Idea Before Affect interpretation, the demonstration supports the Affective Imagination interpretation. I will thus take it as a defeasible position that Spinoza holds something akin to the view of Affective Imagination interpretation. But the question remains just how to understand our imaginations -- how objects are presented as present to us -- as constituted by the way we are affected.

E3p15 on its face trivially follows from E3p14. If our experience of the affects can be a matter simply of our past experience, we can find ourselves affected in a particular way by something simply because we happened to have been affected that way in the past, not because of any intrinsic aspect of that thing. And the corollary notes just how these accidents

¹⁵ It is instructive, however, that in this demonstration he shifts from talking of 'our ideas of external bodies' (the language of E2p16C) to 'imagination'.

become entrenched. For once we are affected with joy or sadness in imagining what we do, we, in virtue of that affect, are either empowered or disempowered; joy just is an increase of our power, and sadness just is a decrease of our power.

The corollary to this proposition signals that there is a close connection between our being affected with joy or sadness, irrespective of what the cause is, and our loving or hating the object. The Idea Before Affect model would seem to require that we have a prior objectless feeling of joy or sadness that then comes to accompany our idea of an object, resulting in our feeling love and hatred. But this is not the picture presented by this corollary. Our joy or sadness is not objectless, but rather involves regarding an object, whether the joy or sadness has been caused by that object or not. The question that began to emerge in the previous section, and then again in consideration of E3p12 and p13 arises here yet again: In what way do joy and sadness have an object, and how does the way in which they do have an object related to the imagination that accompanies them to constitute love and hatred?

2.3 Affective Imaginative Associations and the Workings of the Human Mind

Spinoza in E3p16 explicates further the content of E3p15 and begins to address the question raised by its corollary. At an initial reading, again, of the proposition on its own, Spinoza seems to appeal to a principle of association by resemblance, and then asserts that the association of affects tracks the resemblance or likeness in the objects. While this reading squares well with the Ideas Before Affects interpretation, it would seem to ignore the puzzle from the previous corollary about the connection between joy and love and sadness and hatred. Indeed, that puzzle only intensifies in this proposition, with the quick slide from one set of affects (joy and sadness) to the other (love and hatred).

The demonstration of the proposition helps to elucidate what is at issue: the way in which the various qualities of objects color the way in which we are affected by, and so

imagine, objects *as a whole*. The demonstration of the proposition states the basic premise of the proposition to be that a shared quality -- by hypothesis, the basis of the claim of likeness -- of the original object and a second object has engendered the feelings of sadness or joy towards the original object. The proposition asserts that through this point of similarity, we come to feel love or hatred for the second object *as a whole*. There are three points to note here. First, this quality causes us to be affected with joy or sadness, rather than with love or hatred. Second, the quality itself causes us to be affected consistently. Third, while there is no basis for thinking that the quality stands in the same relation to the whole in the case of each of the two objects, we nonetheless assume that they do. Here is what I think is going on: The quality of the original object affects us with joy or sadness, and we move from that joy or sadness to love or hate the original object *as a whole*. In this way, our joy or sadness can be understood as attaching to an imagined object, but not in virtue of being independent of it. Rather, the joy with which a quality affects us, anchors our relating that quality to other qualities and so to imagining an object -- that is, a unified collection of qualities -- as the object we do. This account helps to make sense of the proposition itself. Through the quality shared by the original and the second object, we feel joy or sadness, and the quality, through this similarity, serves to anchor our imagination of the second object as an object, feeling love or hatred for it.

These details add flesh to the Affective Imagination account. Imagining objects involves forming an idea with an array of qualities. The qualities of things affect us with joy and sadness, and through those affects we form ideas of whole objects towards which we feel love and hatred. In this way it also begins to shed light on the relation between joy and love, or sadness and hate. Joy and sadness do represent qualities of things, but they do not

represent whole objects. Insofar as joy and sadness are increases or decreases of our own power, they serve as a guide for our relating ourselves to the world around us.

In this way, the proposition and its demonstration also begin to shed light on the halting way in which we begin to understand the world around us. We imagine objects through how their qualities affect us, by relating those qualities to the object as a whole. Insofar as different things share qualities, we draw on those similarities in imagining that objects whose qualities are similar are themselves similar, even though they do not affect us directly. In this way, we begin to extend our understanding outward, hazarding a hypothesis about the way things are. However, there is no reason to think that the way in which the parts of one thing are related to form a whole object is similar to the way the parts of another thing are related, even if some of the parts are similar. Qualities, after all, can be combined in different ways. Thus, our hypothesis remains just that.

E3p17 continues to explore the relation between the parts, or qualities, of an object and the whole of which they are parts. In imagining an object, we take it to have an array of qualities, and one of those qualities through itself arouses in us, say, sadness, and so we hate the object we imagine as a result. At the same time, however, other of those qualities through its similarity to other objects leads us to feel joy, and so to love the resulting imagined object. Each of the qualities is taken, in turn, to be representative of the whole of the object, for the affect the quality arouses -- in turn, sadness and joy -- lead us to imagine an object *as a whole* that is, in turn, hateful or loveable. And so, as the scholium to this proposition indicates, we vacillate between two ways of seeing an object. Spinoza notes further that while the proposition turns on the difference between an affect efficiently caused by an object and another felt accidentally through associations, it applies equally to

the various ways in which different parts of our bodies can be affected differently by a single object.

Having established in the immediately preceding propositions how the relations of things to us, in virtue of their qualities, impact how we come to imagine objects, in E3p18 Spinoza turns to consider how our *relations of objects to one another* furthers our affective repertoire. On the face of it, the proposition is focused on how we relate things to one another in time, but, for Spinoza, the temporal relations of things is not a simple matter. The proposition hinges on Spinoza's view of what it is to imagine something -- in imagining an object we simply consider it as present, whether or not it exists. And so in this simple imagination of an object, isolated by its relations to other things, we are affected in the same way irrespective of when that object occurs in time. Indeed, Spinoza suggests that we only consider an object in time by relating it to other objects. However, in imagining an object first in relation to some objects we take to be present now, or in relation to other things have existed in the past, or further in relation to yet more things that we take to exist in the future, we come to situate that object in time.

Spinoza recognizes, however, that insofar as we imagine things in the past or the future, we can situate them with respect to other things in a variety of ways. And the way we are affected varies with array of relations of things that we imagine. We thus find ourselves feeling hope, fear, confidence, despair, gladness and remorse, which are defined not only by how they situate their objects in time, and whether the affect is positive or negative, but also by its very inconstancy.

Spinoza's discussion of this point highlights that these affects are not a direct response to things in themselves, or even to our ideas of them, but rather arise in our imagination of objects as they stand in relations to other objects. It also sheds further light

on how the affects relate to one another. In being affected with joy and sadness, we imagine objects, but in imagining objects in time, that is, in the past or future, we situate them in relation to one another and to other objects. Joy and sadness are not implicated directly in these relations. Rather, our being affected with hope, fear and the like constitutes our relating of objects to one another.¹⁶

Again, we can see how these affects are intimately connected with our efforts at expanding our understanding. Our relations between whole objects, just as relations between qualities in the whole, are hypothetical. There are many ways to situate objects in relation to one another, and insofar as our imagination of objects in relation to one another and to other objects varies with the ways we situate them, so too does our hope, fear, and so on. We see things in relation to one another in a variety of ways, and by navigating through that variety begin to get a further grip on the world around us.

E3p19-E3p24 form a collection of propositions in which Spinoza turns to consider a particular kind of relation in which we might imagine objects to stand to one another: a causal relation. For Spinoza, causal relations are a matter of either preserving or compromising the existence of a thing.¹⁷ A thing causally affects us insofar as it either increases or decreases our *conatus*, and as we have seen, our experience of the affects turns on the ways in which things causally affect us in this way. We are affected with joy as our power to persevere increases and with sadness as it decreases, and insofar as we are affected we imagine the world around us, love and hate those objects we imagine, and hope and fear objects as we relate them to one another. In these propositions, Spinoza considers how we

¹⁶ We do not first relate objects to one another, and then as a result of appreciating those relations feel hope, fear, etc. Our hope and fear, just is our relating objects to one another.

¹⁷ There is, of course, much more to say about how Spinoza understands causal relations. I do not want to delve into interpretations of E1p16, and its corollaries, E1p17 and p18, E1p25-p29 here, but it is sufficient for my point here that, for Spinoza, causation is intimately tied to existence, which for finite things, or modes, is transient.

extend our view, from considering things simply insofar as they causally impact us to considering how they causally impact one another, and in turn how *those* causal relations impact us. So one thing either destroys another-- that is, effects its ceasing to exist or decreases its *conatus* -- or preserves it in existence, increasing its *conatus*. If the thing in question increases our own power to persevere, we feel joy, imagine it as an object and love that object. So, if the object we love is destroyed, that increase of our own power goes missing, and so our power decreases, and we are saddened -- we imagine the cause of this sadness with hate. If the object we love continues to exist, its own power increases and it is affected with joy. But of course, its continued existence results in our continuing to be affected with joy, and to continue imagining that object. Thus, we love that object we imagine as the cause of the continued existence of the object of our love and its joy (E3p21 and 22). In this way, through our affects, we begin to extend our imagination, and so our understanding, beyond what immediately affects us. The causal relations get extended further, as we imagine the way in which what we love or hate can be harmed -- that is, experience sadness -- and helped -- that is, experience joy, we imagine the causes of those changes with the appropriate affect: we love what harms the existence of what we hate, hate what helps what we hate to exist, love what helps what we love to exist, and hate what harms the existence what we love (E3p23 and 24). Thus, through our affective responses, and our imagination, we build up step by step our understanding of the causal relations that comprise the world.

3. Spinoza's associationism and the subordination of epistemology to ethics

We are now in a position to better understand Spinoza's associationism. Insofar as our ideas are, in the first instance, imaginings, and these imaginings are inadequate ideas, it is

hard to see how we can move from that position of relative ignorance to one in which our ideas can tell us something about the natures of those things. Indeed, the problem starts at a very fundamental level. If we take the human body to be one node in an infinite causal nexus of extended things, and the human mind's imagining what it does in virtue of the causal interaction of other things within that nexus with the human body, the standard question for causal accounts of representation inevitably arises: Why do we imagine one particular object rather than another? Understanding our imaginations to reflect the ways in which causal interactions affect our power to persevere short-circuits that question. We are not to be understood as representing self-standing objects in the causal nexus but rather as perceiving Nature as it appears to us in virtue how we are essentially affected. Spinoza in E2p16 noted that all our ideas of external bodies involve the nature of our human body as well the nature of the external body, and insofar as this is the case, those ideas we have of external bodies tell us more about our own body than the nature of the causes of those bodies (E2p16c). Spinoza introduces the notion of imagination in E2p17, but he does not expand on how these imaginings satisfy the claims of E2p16 and its corollary. The interpretation offered here shows that he makes good on this claim in Part 3 of the *Ethics*.

We are essentially affected by the impact of the world on our *conatus*, our power to continue to exist, and those impacts are manifest mentally as joy and sadness. Joy and sadness afford us an awareness of the way in which the world affects us, even if they do not tell us much else about the world. However, through joy and sadness, we become aware of the world in another way: we imagine the world -- things -- as existing objects we love or hate.

It is worth highlighting that the relation between joy and love, and sadness and hatred, on the interpretation I have offered parallels the way in which I have suggested we

understand the distinction between appetite and desire articulated in E3p9s. Recall, I suggested that we distinguish two ways in which Spinoza takes us to be aware of our striving to persevere. The first is a first order awareness, those appetites for what keeps us in existence. But we can also be aware of our appetites, that is, have desires, whereby we affirm what we take to be good for us. These desires, it is worth noting, can be misguided. We can misunderstand our appetites, and so mischaracterize what is good for us. In a similar way, joy and sadness constitute our awareness of the ways in which the world affect our being. But we also become aware of the world through this awareness. The way we are affected may tell us more about our nature, but it also does still tell us something about the nature of external things, and we can leverage our joy and sadness to imagine those things as objects affecting us. Insofar as our imaginations are inadequate ideas, we misunderstand how the world is causally affecting us, and so mischaracterize things.

From his explanation of how we focus our attention, Spinoza also goes on to show how from our affective responses to the world we begin to reason -- we relate things to one another as similar or different on the basis of whether their qualities arouse in us a similar feeling, and we begin to imagine things with comparable qualities on the basis of the similarities of feeling. Equally, through relating the objects we imagine to one another, we begin to expand our affective repertoire. Finally, through the ways in which our affects vary in accord with the perseverance or destruction of the objects we imagine, we begin to understand the causal relations of things. In this way, the interpretation I have been developing also helps us understand why the work is titled *Ethica*. For assuming the metaphysics that Spinoza outlines in Parts 1 and 2, the human mind is only able to understand the world through the way we are affected by things. But equally, our understanding of the world can improve insofar as we become more aware of the ways

things affect us, that is, by extending the network of relations of our ideas. We do this through our interactions with others who are affected similarly to us, that is, by living in community with other human beings. For Spinoza, epistemology is truly subordinate to ethics in this way.

I will close with some brief remarks about the differences between Spinoza and Hume. For Hume, as noted at the outset of the paper, also sees the imagination as guided by three principles of association: resemblance, contiguity in time or place, and cause and effect (THN 1.1.4.1).¹⁸ Equally, he subordinates reason to the passions: "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." (THN 2.3.3.4) Despite these superficial similarities, there are significant points of difference. First, for Hume, associative principles guide the mind in connecting up fully formed imaginations. I have been suggesting here that for Spinoza affective associations serve to help construct our imaginings. If there is a point of contact between Spinoza and Hume here, it is to be found in Hume's discussion in THN 1.4.2 *Of scepticism with regard to the senses*, in which strives to explain how we can have ideas of objects with a continued and distinct existence on empiricist grounds. Such a comparison is far beyond the scope of this paper. Secondly, the point of the oft-cited passage in Hume's discussion of how we are motivated to action is to note that it is our passions that move us to act, and not reason understood as the relations of ideas. For Hume, it is far from clear whether there is an order to nature. In THN 1.3.3, Hume takes issue for existing arguments for the claim that everything has a cause, and seems to remain agnostic about the ultimate answer. We can try to understand the social mechanisms through which we feel the passions we do, for Hume, but we cannot ultimately explain why we feel what we do. Spinoza would certainly agree that

¹⁸ David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*. (Abbreviated THN followed by Book.Part.Section.Paragraph)

we are moved to act by the ways in which we are affected by things and that because of our position of relative ignorance, we do well to understand the social mechanisms that shape how we are affected (that is the project of Part 4 of the *Ethics*, after all). However, for him, we can and do strive to understand why we are moved in the way we are. That is, we can strive to understand the order of nature, of which we are a part, and our place in it. Our affects are the vehicle we have, indeed the only vehicle we have, for achieving that understanding.

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