

4 Descartes and Spinoza on the Primitive Passions

Why so Different?

Lisa Shapiro

The dryness of the lists that form the taxonomies of the passions seems to sap the life out of the emotions they catalog.¹ These taxonomies take phenomena that are fodder for the moralist as she paints a world as infused with emotions, grips our imaginations, and inspires us to lead better lives, and break them to pieces in the effort to getting to basic principles proper to the scientist. Nonetheless, there is something to be gained from considering these taxonomies. I aim to show that the primitive or primary passions (or affects, in the case of Spinoza) in particular tell us something about how a philosopher conceives of the structure of thought; if not categories themselves, they highlight the dimensions that structure our thinking, if not our mental representations. It is perhaps worth noting that this way of thinking about the passions moves away both from the common view that emotions are mere feelings, or impulses, and from the opposing view that emotions are judgments.

Motivating my discussion is a puzzle in Spinoza's account of the primary affects – his shift away from adopting Descartes's list of six primitive passions in the *Short Treatise* to the three primary affects in the *Ethics*. I lay out this puzzle in Section 1. In Section 2, I approach this puzzle by considering the taxonomy offered by Descartes of the basic or primitive passions. In considering Descartes, I will also briefly consider Aquinas's view since Descartes positions himself as rejecting the Thomist account. Doing so brings out that the basic passions highlight structures of cognition for these thinkers. In Section 3, I return to Spinoza and consider what light his pared down account of the primary affects can shed on his account of the human mind.

1 A Puzzle about Spinoza on the Primary Affects

In *Ethics* 3p11, Spinoza marks three of the affects as primary (*affectum primum*). Most interpreters reflexively note that joy (*laetitia*), sadness (*tristitia*), and desire (*cupiditas*) are, taxonomically at least, akin to Descartes's primitive passions, and the shift from “primitive” to “primary” does not seem problematic. Nonetheless, there are questions. Why these? In what sense are they primary? How do the other affects enumerated relate to these? These relatively fine-grained questions gain force in

considering Spinoza's relation to his predecessors, and in particular to Descartes.

In marking only three primary affects, Spinoza parts from Descartes, who, in his *Passions of the Soul*, lists six primitive passions: wonder, love, hate, joy, sadness, and desire. That Spinoza read the *Passions* is clear as he makes mention of it in the *Ethics*, in the Preface to Part 3 and most explicitly in the Preface to Part 5.² Moreover, in the early draft of the *Ethics*, the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza seems to follow Descartes quite closely. While he does not there identify any passions as primary, in Part 2, chapters 3–14, Spinoza offers an initial catalog of what he there calls passions (*Lydinge [Passien]*) in the context of explaining how they arise from opinion (or false belief) (KV II 3–14, G I 56–78). His enumeration closely follows that of Descartes: he begins with wonder, then moves to love, hate, and desire, followed by joy and sadness. Also like Descartes, he proceeds with a finer-grained enumeration, including esteem and disdain, and their variants (including legitimate self-esteem, humility, pride, and self-deprecation), as well as hope and fear (and their variants: confidence, despair, vacillations, strength of character, tenacity, emulation, cowardice, consternation, jealousy), as well as other passions (remorse and repentance, mockery and ridicule, love of esteem, shame, shamelessness, favor, gratitude, ingratitude, and longing).

The similarity between the enumeration of the *Short Treatise* and the enumeration in articles 53–68 of Part 2 of Descartes's *Passions of the Soul* is striking and undeniable. Descartes does not highlight the primitive passions as such in those articles – that enumeration begins with *Passions* art. 69, which asserts that there are only six that are “simple and primitive” (AT XI 380).³ While Descartes promises to show how the other “particular” passions derive from the primitives, he is not entirely clear what the relation is between the primitive passions and the others. It can seem that the primitive passions mark out the basic ways in which objects “can harm or profit us or, generally, be important to us” (*Passions* art. 52, AT XI 372), whereas the particular passions involve fine-tuning those representational attitudes to particular kinds of objects. The account I develop in Section 2 suggests that there is more going on. Insofar as Spinoza does not highlight primitive or primary passions in the *Short Treatise*, it is hard to tell whether or not he would endorse Descartes's list of primitives or his way of distinguishing primitive from other passions at that point.

By the time the *Ethics* is written, Spinoza has shifted his enumeration to highlight three primary affects, from which the rest arise. We can rightly ask what drives the shift in his position. He does provide us with an explanation of why he dispenses with wonder as a primitive passion, or indeed as an affect at all:

. . . when the image of the thing is new . . . the mind will be detained in regarding the same thing until it is determined by other causes to

think of other things. So the imagination of a new thing, considered in itself, is of the same nature as the other [imaginings], and for this reason I do not number wonder among the affects. Nor do I see why I should, since this distraction of the mind does not arise from any positive cause which distracts the mind from other things, but only from the fact that there is no cause determining the mind to pass from regarding one thing to thinking of others.

(3DA4exp)

Wonder consists of the mind's being stuck, as it were, on a particular imagining, on a representation of a singular thing, and not moving on to other ideas, and so does not merit being called an affect at all, for Spinoza. One might ask why being stuck on a single thought is reason to reject an idea as an affect, and I will return to consider why Spinoza denies wonder is an affect in Section 3. At this point, I simply note that his explanation of why he does not follow Descartes's views on wonder does not generalize to explain why he also ceases to follow Descartes in taking love and hatred as primary. So, the puzzle remains.

Spinoza's primary affects overlap significantly with the Stoic main emotions: pleasure, pain, desire, and fear.⁴ One might try to explain Spinoza's shift away from the Cartesian taxonomy by his embrace of neo-Stoic views. On the face of it, the principal difference between the two taxonomies is that Spinoza's discounts fear as a primary affect, defining it rather as a species of sadness, "an inconstant sadness, which has also arisen from the image of a doubtful thing" (3p18s2). However, their thinking about even pleasure and pain needs to be reconciled as the Stoics take pleasure and pain to be beliefs, and Spinoza takes pleasure and pain to be the affects of joy and sadness "ascribed to a man when one part of him is affected more than the rest" and "related to the mind and body at once," that is, just as much physical states as mental states (3p11s). While it is uncontroversial that Spinoza was influenced by the Stoics in his account of the affects, there remains a puzzle about what in the Stoic model of emotions he found attractive and why he rejects the Stoic foregrounding of fear as a principal emotion. So, appeal to this Stoic influence does not really work as a solution to the puzzle of his shift to three primary affects.

As posed, these puzzles concern Spinoza's taxonomy of the affects, but the core issue is not about the taxonomy itself so much as it is about the philosophical motivation behind it. That Spinoza changes his taxonomy brings out the need for such an explanation. But given that he himself says next to nothing about this, it is hard to know how to proceed.

There is a long philosophical history of offering taxonomies of emotions, though only some single out a subset as primitive or primary, and of those, even fewer explain *why* that subset of passions is more basic than others. I propose to proceed by looking at the taxonomy that we

do know Spinoza considered and rejected: that of Descartes. While Descartes himself does not explain his reasons for assigning some passions primitive status, looking at his discussion and considering his divergence from his predecessor Aquinas is suggestive. By situating Spinoza's enumeration of the primary affects in the *Ethics* against this background, we can better understand just what role the primary affects play in his philosophical psychology.

2 Descartes (and Aquinas)

After laying out an array of passions in the early articles of Part 2 of the *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes both explains this enumeration and sets up his identification of six primitive passions as follows:

Such is the order which seems to me to be the best for enumerating the passions. I know well that I am departing from the opinion of all those who have written about it before. But this is not without good reason. For they obtain their enumeration by distinguishing two appetites in the sensitive part of the soul, of which they name one the Concupiscent and the other the Irascible. And because I discern no distinction of parts of the soul . . . this seems to me to mean nothing except that it has two faculties, one of desiring and the other of being vexed. And because it has in the same way the faculties of wondering, loving, hoping, fearing, and thus of receiving each of the other passions into itself, or doing the actions these passions impel it to do, I fail to see why they wanted to refer all of them to concupiscence or anger.

(*Passions* art. 68, AT XI 379)

Descartes does not so much justify what has preceded this article as mark Aquinas as his target. The argument seems to be that the Thomist distinction between the concupiscent and irascible passions turns on an assumption that there are different parts of the soul. Without that assumption, concupiscence (desiring) and irascibility (being vexed) are just like other passions, and there is no reason to privilege concupiscence or irascibility as organizational principles. While it is not clear that Descartes has properly understood the Thomist account, there are two points to highlight here. First, Descartes ~~takes it that~~ the indivisibility of the mind – there being no parts of the soul – is a core commitment, and one that constrains any taxonomy of the passions. We thus need to understand how his list of primitives is designed to satisfy this constraint. Second, and this is the point I will consider first, despite his assertion that he rejects the Thomist account of the passions, Descartes's list of primitives overlaps significantly with Aquinas's concupiscent passions (he adds wonder and rejects distinguishing

desire and aversion). While he does reject all of the irascible passions as primitives, we can still ask why Descartes preserves what he does of the Thomist account. To address this question, I will need to briefly consider Aquinas.

Most of the focus on Thomas's taxonomy of the passions has been on his differentiation of the passions by the formal features of their objects.⁵ Concupiscent passions are all immediately felt pleasures and pains, whereas irascible passions all involve a kind of struggle and are experienced only after an intermediary passion. Thus, they are often understood as distinguished by the ease or difficulty with which we can acquire or avoid the good or evil that is their object. The concupiscent passions are further differentiated along three dimensions: by whether they are sensations of goods and evils, by the inclination to action they contain, and by whether their object is at a distance or possessed. So, love and hatred are sensations of the good and evil of an object, desire and aversion move us towards or away from the object that is loved or hated, and joy and sadness highlight the proximity or possession of either a good or an evil. The differentiation of the irascible passions follows similar lines. Hope and despair are contrary attitudes towards a good (or loved) object that is hard to acquire; fear and confidence are similarly contrary attitudes towards an evil (or hated) object that is difficult to avoid. All four concern some object in the future, and they presuppose a concupiscent passion (in particular, love or hatred through which we have sensed the value of their object) towards the object in the present. Anger is a response to an object that has caused our succumbing to an evil, that is, caused our experience of a negative concupiscent emotion, and as such seems to stand alone as depending upon information about the causal influence an object has on us.

Though Aquinas focuses on the different aspects of the formal features of objects, the enumeration of these features of objects also highlights our *cognitive access* to them in experience. First, love and hatred mark not only that objects are good or bad but also that we experience objects to have a particular value. Second, desire and aversion mark that objects either attract or repulse us and so, equally, that we experience being drawn to (or away from) objects whose value attracts (or repulses) us. And third, desire and aversion, along with joy and sadness, presuppose that valuable objects are situated in relation to us in space and time. Desire and aversion are premised on an object's being at a distance from us, while joy and sadness take objects to be present with us or separated from us. The irascible passions further articulate these aspects of objects and our cognition of them insofar as they are all concerned with objects situated at various degrees of remoteness and in the future, and so further demand that we situate objects relative to each other and to ourselves in space and time. Anger introduces a causal dimension to thought.⁶

Aquinas's taxonomy of the passions marks out both formal features of objects and our cognitive access to those features. In so doing, his account highlights his view of the fundamental features of our way of experiencing things, that is, of cognition: value, inclination to action, and situation in time and space.⁷ If this is on the right track, then any revision to the most basic passions within a taxonomy should come along with a revision to the account of cognition.

Let me now return to Descartes. As I have already noted, he identifies six primitive passions: wonder, love, hate, joy, sadness, and desire. Five of these overlap with Aquinas's concupiscent passions. However, Descartes subsumes aversion under desire – aversion is simply a desire to avoid – and adds wonder as the first of the passions. Rather than focus on these differences, I want to test my hypothesis that a set of basic passions in a taxonomy highlight features of cognition by examining just how Descartes's primitive passions stand with respect to his account of cognition. In this regard, there is an important difference between Descartes and Aquinas. For Aquinas, cognition involves apprehending features of objects directly, whereas for Descartes, cognition involves representing objects. We should thus expect that, whereas Aquinas's taxonomy highlights features of objects in the first instance, the primitive passions within Descartes's taxonomy ought to highlight, in the first instance, features of our representations.

Descartes's introduction to his taxonomy squares with this point. In the *Passions of the Soul*, he prefaces his enumeration of the passions by noting that

objects which move the senses do not excite different passions in us in proportion to all of their diversities, but only in proportion to the different ways they can harm or profit us or, generally, be important to us; and that the use of all the passions consists in this alone: they dispose the soul to will the things nature tells us are useful and to persist in this volition . . . This is why, in order to enumerate them, one needs only to investigate in order, in how many different ways that are important to us our senses can be moved by their objects.

(*Passions* art. 52, AT XI 372)

His denial that a proper taxonomy of the passions ought to be determined by features of objects seems to be a pointed rejection of the Thomist taxonomic principle. Descartes suggests that the passions are all species of the primitive passions, which mark out the basic ways in which objects "can harm or profit us or, generally, be important to us" (*Passions* art. 52, AT XI 372). But it is not clear how the importance of things to us is supposed to serve as the organizing principle of his taxonomy.

Denis Kambouchner has noted the peculiarity of Descartes's initial enumeration of the passions, followed by his identification of a subset

as primitive.⁸ It is neither a set of basic elements that can be combined with one another to give us more complex passions nor a set of simples which gain complexity through the introduction of a variety of factors (for instance, a temporal or a spatial dimension). Rather, Kambouchner notes, Descartes's enumeration of the passions follows our *experience* of them, not unlike the way in which the *Meditations* takes the experience of thinking as the starting point of its reconception of thought. If Kambouchner is correct, the primitive passions certainly highlight features of Cartesian cognition. The question remains which features they highlight, and how they reflect the central differences between the Thomist and Cartesian accounts of cognition.

Though Descartes introduces the primitive passions in a way that suggests that their status as primitives is either logical or taxonomical,⁹ it would seem that he distinguishes them from one another through their proper dimension of importance. An initial survey of Descartes's primitive passions seems to confirm this expectation. Wonder tracks the rare and extraordinary, love tracks suitability, and hate tracks harmfulness. As the list continues, however, the principle of distinction becomes less clear, for desire, like love, involves the representation of things as suitable, as does joy, and sadness involves the representation of an evil, as does hatred. Thus, it cannot be that the enumeration of primitive passions is derived solely from a set of basic ways in which things are important to us. More explanation is required.

I suggested that Aquinas's taxonomy of the passions highlighted his conception of how our cognition conforms to essential features of the objects in the world: that they are good and bad, that they attract and repel us, and that they are situated in space and time. I want now to suggest that the primitive passions for Descartes are *primitives* not only because they reflect the different dimensions in which things are important to us but also because they too highlight essential features of our representations of the world, features that are not derived from features of objects; they highlight essential structural features of experience.¹⁰

What does it mean to say that the primitive passions highlight essential structural features of experience? Kambouchner's discussion of the primitive passions is again helpful as on his reading, the primitive passions are *psychologically* primitive insofar as they are ideas, that is, *formally*.¹¹ To bring out that the primitive passions ought to be taken formally, Kambouchner looks to the definition of love. For Descartes,

love is an excitation of the soul, caused by the motion of the spirits, which incites it to join itself in volition [*se joindre de volonté*] to the objects that appear to be suitable to it.

(*Passions* art. 79, AT XI 387)

On Kambouchner's reading, "the act of the soul that consists in "joining itself *de volonté*" to its objects itself constitutes an act of representation"

(1995, 248), one that immediately arises with the body's being in a physiological state. As Descartes explicates the phrase *de volunté*, it is "the consent by which we consider ourselves from the present as joined with what we love, in such a way that we imagine a whole of which we think ourselves to be only one part and the thing loved another" (*Passions* art. 80, AT XI 387). Considering ourselves as joined with another *just is* taking that other to be valuable or suitable to us. Joining ourselves willingly here is *just* the act, the willful ascription of value, to something, a thing that gets circumscribed as the thing it is in virtue of our situating ourselves in relation to it. In love, then, the movement of the spirits moves the will (that is, the soul) to ascribe value and thereby to define itself in relation to things. In so doing, it effectively defines things.

We can see from this account that, for Descartes, the object of love is not intrinsically valuable, as it is for Aquinas, but rather becomes valuable *to us* through our representation of it as joined to us. This account of love, thus, already reflects a central difference between the Thomist and the Cartesian accounts of mind. Kambouchner argues that Descartes's account of love generalizes to the other primitive passions so that, in each case, we find that the "unity of the act of the soul determines alone the unity of the passion itself" (1995, 250). Thus, again, the indivisibility of the Cartesian mind is central to Descartes's account of the primitive passions. Kambouchner's account also shows that love and hatred, as primitive passions, highlight two features of Cartesian thought: (1) the *activity* of our representing things as valuable in some way and (2) ~~that~~ our representations of things as valuable involve situating ourselves in relation to others.

We are now in a position to compare Descartes's and Aquinas's accounts of love and hatred as primitive passions. For both, love and hatred involve the apprehension of things as good and bad, and an inclination of the will to act accordingly, but this is but a superficial similarity. For Aquinas, love and hatred track properties of objects, and the way they incline the will is not included in their definition. Descartes effectively reconceives of each of these elements. For him, love and hatred includes an act of will and so marks our apprehensions of good and bad as representations that we are *active* in creating. And moreover, our representations of value are not inert. They move us to join ourselves to (or to avoid) the object we love (or hate).

While Kambouchner's account helps in understanding the role of love and hatred as primitive passions, it falls short with respect to wonder, desire, joy, and sadness. He seems to maintain that what distinguishes Cartesian primitive passions are the particular dimensions of importance informing the representation constituting the act of the soul. However, we have already seen that this principle is insufficient to distinguish love from desire and joy, and hatred from sadness. We need to look to the features of cognition that these remaining primitive passions highlight for him and how those features are organized differently than they are in Aquinas's account.

Let me begin with wonder, which, for Descartes, is situated first among the primitive passions and is defined as “a sudden surprise of the soul which carries it to consider attentively those objects which seem to it rare and extraordinary” (*Passions* art. 70, AT XI 380). As such, it is the one passion that does not concern good or evil, and so, it does not move us to outwardly directed actions. Rather, it moves us to know the new and extraordinary thing before us, of which we have been up to that point ignorant, and to give it “great consideration.” Wonder helps us in remembering things and “disposes us to the acquisition of the sciences” (*Passions* art. 76, AT XI 385).

Wonder highlights an aspect of Cartesian thought that is not an issue for Aquinas. On the causal resemblance account of representation held by Aquinas, there is a very straightforward way of explaining why it is we have one thought at the fore of our mind rather than another: it is simply a matter of features of the object itself. Some things simply are more attention-getting than others, and attention-getting objects simply come to the fore of our mind. Descartes, however, rejects this account of representation. As the Sixth Meditation proof for the existence of bodies makes clear, while it is the case that objects cause us to have ideas, it is not the case that objects imbue our ideas with properties of those objects – our ideas need not resemble their causes.¹² Since for him, ideas need not resemble their causes, Descartes needs to explain how some ideas come to the fore of our mind rather than others. Wonder at the very least highlights this demand on Cartesian thought. And we might also think that wonder provides the account Descartes requires for wonder is our response to variations in our experience, new or unusual patterns in the way the world causally impacts on us: it is attention.

Let me now proceed to consider desire. Descartes, like Aquinas, takes desire as a primitive passion to highlight that we represent things within time. Descartes defines desire as “an agitation of the soul, caused by the spirits, which disposes it to will for the future the things it represents to itself to be suitable,” and he continues,

thus, we desire not only the presence of absent good but also the preservation of the present, and in addition the absence of evil, both what we already have and what we believe we might receive in time to come.

(*Passions* art. 86, AT XI 392)

This definition explicitly invokes the present and the future, as well as the future-directedness of the actions arising from desire, and so highlights the temporal aspect of thought. Equally, the language of “presence’ and ‘absence’ suggests that the passion also highlights the spatial aspects of our representations. Descartes’s initial characterization of

desire in *Passions* art. 56 also highlights these spatial and temporal dimensions of thought:

All the other passions originate from the same consideration of good and evil, but to put them in order I distinguish times from one another, and considering that [these passions] incline us much more to face the future than the present or the past, I begin with Desire. For it is plain that it always faces the future – not only when one desires to acquire a good one does not yet have or avoid an evil one judges might occur, but also when one wishes only the preservation of a good or the absence of an evil, which is all this passion can extend to.

(AT XI 374–375)

Thus, for Descartes, desire is properly a primitive passion because it highlights the way our representations are situated in time and, to a degree, in space.¹³

It also helps us to see how Descartes further reconfigures the Thomist account. For Aquinas, recall, desire did highlight the temporality of thought in his taxonomy of primary passions. However, for Aquinas, desire and aversion principally bring out how we are drawn to or repelled by objects. It makes sense that Descartes retains desire – a passion that builds a temporal dimension into its function – to highlight that aspect of thought. But it is important to Descartes's account that the mind is *active* in its representation of value, and this active representation contains within it the inclination to action. The passivity of desire's attraction (and aversion's repulsion) does not fit into Descartes's account, and love and hatred on the Cartesian account already incorporate our inclinations toward or away from things.

It remains to consider joy and sadness. Whereas, for Aquinas, joy and sadness serve to highlight the way in which we represent things in space, for Descartes, joy and sadness are passions defined by their representation of their objects as *belonging* to us. This point is emphasized in the initial and subsequent definitions of joy and sadness:

The consideration of a present good excites joy in us, that of evil sadness, when it is a good or evil which is represented to us *as belonging to us*.

(*Passions* art. 61, AT XI 376)

Joy is a delightful excitation of the soul, wherein consists the enjoyment it has of the good which the impressions of the brain represent to it as its own.

(*Passions* art. 91, AT XI 396)

Sadness is an unpleasant languor, wherein consists the distress which the soul receives from the evil or defect which the impressions of the brain represent as belonging to it.

(*Passions* art. 92, AT XI 397)

What is central to Descartes's account is not so much that we enjoy the good we now have (and so near us) but that we enjoy its being *ours*. Equally, we feel sadness insofar as we are part of something bad.¹⁴ To consider something as belonging to us, we need to be able to distinguish ourselves from those things that are not us. Drawing this distinction involves self-awareness. If we think of the primitive passions as highlighting structural features of thought, for Descartes, joy and sadness seem to be highlighting the reflexivity in his account of representational thought, the way in which thought, for him, essentially involves the consciousness or awareness whereby that thought is my own. Throughout the *Meditations*, and elsewhere, he consistently uses this same language – that of ‘belonging’ – to characterize his essence. And what marks his essence is the conception of thinking evident in the *cogito*. There, the meditator establishes through his self-awareness that he is thinking, that is, the indubitability of the fact that he is thinking while he is doing so, that thinking is the attribute that constitutes him as the thing he is or that which properly belongs to him.

I hope that this survey is sufficient to have shown that it is at least plausible to think of taxonomies of primitive passions as highlighting structural features of a philosopher's account of cognition or thought. And moreover, I hope to have shown how shifts in these taxonomies reflect substantial differences in a philosopher's conception of mind from that of his predecessors. For Descartes's shift from Aquinas's taxonomy of the concupiscent passions seems designed to reflect the changes in his own conception of thought from that of Aquinas. Descartes introduces wonder, and as the first of all the passions, because, unlike Aquinas, he denies that ideas represent what they do because they resemble their causes. He needs an account of how we attend to objects and then go on to represent them. Love and hatred, while they do still reflect that we cognize the value of things in relation to us for Descartes, also importantly highlight that those representations of things as valuable are *active* rather than a passive reception of the relational properties of things. This active representation of value allows Descartes to incorporate our inclination to act on our evaluations into the passions of love and hatred. For Aquinas, that inclination was highlighted in the passions of desire and aversion. On the Thomist account, desire (and aversion) also highlighted the temporal dimension of cognition, and Descartes preserves desire as a primitive passion to highlight the temporality of thought. He dispenses of aversion because that passion does not contain within it any distinctive dimension of thought. Joy and sadness are also shifted within the Cartesian system. Within Thomas's account, joy and sadness highlight a spatial dimension of cognition. For Descartes, joy and sadness, in concerning principally

whether or not a thing belongs to us, highlight the awareness or reflexivity proper to and defining of his conception of thought.

3 Spinoza Revisited

If I am correct that taxonomies of passions highlight structural features of cognition, Spinoza's shift from the *Short Treatise* to the *Ethics* is best understood through the lens of his critique of Descartes's account of cognition. As is well recognized, Spinoza's critique of Descartes's account of mind involves at minimum two key elements: (a) though Spinoza follows Descartes in recognizing there to be only efficient causal interaction between the world (conceived under the attribute of Extension) and our bodies, he wholly rejects Descartes's metaphysical dualism. For Spinoza, per 2p7s,

the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now comprehended under this attribute, now under that; so also a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing but expressed in two ways.

With that rejection, Spinoza disavows the idea that body and mind causally interact. And (b) though Spinoza follows Descartes in taking all thought to be representational and in denying that representation is a matter of resemblance between thought and object, he also denies that there is any special activity proper to thought, and so, he bears a burden of explaining the source of the content of our ideas. In assuming this burden, he complicates Descartes's conception of thought as intrinsically both conscious and representational. An infinite mind – Nature understood under the attribute of Thought – is aware of the object of each and all of its ideas. However, in the case of a finite mind – a human mind – we can distinguish two senses in which an idea represents. The first sense is articulated through 2p13 and its scholium: “the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else.” The claim here is that the object of an idea, understood metaphysically, is just that body which holds the parallel place in the order of things conceived under the attribute of Extension that the idea holds in the order of things conceived under the attribute of Thought. As the case of 2p13 makes clear, the idea constituting the human mind is not fully conscious of its object, the human body. The second sense, the more familiar epistemic sense, in which an idea represents is introduced in 2p17:

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

As the scholium to the proposition clarifies, the object of idea in this epistemic sense is that of which we are aware or what we regard as present to us. My suggestion is that for Spinoza, the primary affects in the *Ethics*, and their relation to the other affects, are intimately intertwined with this distinction central to his account of mind, as well as with how that distinction emerges from his denial that the mind is intrinsically active and the demand that denial makes for an explanation of how thinking represents and how thoughts become conscious. His pared down list of primary affects – desire, joy, and sadness – should highlight dimensions of this explanation, as should the absence of wonder, love, and hatred as primary passions be consistent with it.

To flesh out this suggestion, let me begin with desire. Spinoza first introduces and defines desire at 3p9s:

When this striving is related only to the mind, it is called will, but when it is related to the mind and the body together, it is called appetite. This appetite, therefore, is 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*.

(3p9s, G II 147–148; first emphasis added,
two others in the original)

Steven Nadler has noted that “it is odd for Spinoza to speak of desire as a species of affect . . . because desire, at least as it is originally defined (3p9s), really just is the power or striving itself whose transitions constitute the affects,” and he goes on to suggest that there are only two primary affects – joy and sadness – for Spinoza.¹⁵ Nadler’s suggestion regarding the redundancy of desire in Spinoza’s system is consistent with the way in which it is defined in the Definitions of the Affects at the end of Part 3: “Desire is man’s very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to do something” (3DA1). Nonetheless, attention to 3p9s suggests that desire is something more than our essence for Spinoza there identifies appetite as the essence of man and distinguishes desire from appetite by the consciousness of appetite it involves.

The introduction of appetite and desire comes in reference to 3p9, which expressly applies the general notion of *conatus* – that the actual essence of a thing is its striving to persevere in its being (3p6 and 3p7) – to the human mind. The proposition itself highlights two features of the

human mind's *conatus* – that it strives in virtue of all its ideas (both adequate and inadequate) and that it entails consciousness of itself. The scholium of the proposition distinguishes three tightly connected concepts. Will is our striving referred to the mind alone. Appetite is our striving referred to mind and body together. And desire, as we have seen, is consciousness of appetite. As we have also seen, Spinoza further defines appetite as “the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation” (3p9s). Insofar as appetite is the striving constituting our essence, we should, by 3p9, be conscious of it. Plausibly, insofar as our appetites move us to act to satisfy those appetites, we are conscious of them. But if we are conscious of our appetites, how are desires any different from appetites? The answer to this question can help us in understanding desire as a primary affect in Spinoza's system.

Spinoza here uses two distinct, though closely related, terms: *conscius* and *conscientia*. The former term is repeated in the proposition, its demonstration and scholium, but the latter term is only used in the definition of desire. *Conscius* connotes a knowing, that is, an awareness, of good and evil, that is in process. 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 movement through which we 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 knowing) 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*, the nominative and so the fixed form of the verb. *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.¹⁶ 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 it. When I desire an apple, I not only am aware of an apple insofar as it is good for me 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 assert that the apple is good and direct myself towards it.¹⁷

If this is correct, then appetite and desire each involve a kind of self-consciousness, which are nonetheless subtly distinct. Appetites reflect a consciousness of my essence – my striving to persevere in existence – simply insofar as my perceiving things as good (or bad) for me involves my distinctive perspective. In desiring something, that self-awareness goes beyond inhabiting a distinctive perspective to asserting that perspective, asserting that something is good *for me*. Despite claiming in the Definition of the Affects that “I really recognize no difference between human appetite and desire” (3DA1exp), Spinoza also there goes on to note that our awareness of our appetites can be more or less complete. Our desires

can leave obscure some parts of what we are striving towards. Spinoza's somewhat further explication of this point suggests that our desires, or consciousness of our appetites, are a result of how we are affected by things – both internal and external causes:

For I could have said that desire is man's very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined to do something. But from this definition (by 2p23) it would not follow that the mind could be conscious of its desire, or appetite. Therefore, *in order to involve the cause of this consciousness*, it was necessary (by the same proposition) to add: *insofar as it is conceived, from some given affection of it, to be determined*, and so on.

(3DA1exp; second emphasis added,
first and third in the original)

Our appetites constitute our essence insofar as they just are our striving to persevere. Our desires also constitute our essence in the same way, but they also involve the causes of our being moved in the way we are. Spinoza suggests here that we are aware of the causes of our striving through the way we are affected. But of course, our awareness of our essence is incomplete or inadequate; we are only partially aware of our essence. So, our desire is our awareness of that *aspect* of our essence, our striving to persevere brought to our attention in virtue of the way we are affected by things (both internal and external).

In this way, desire is what is perhaps the central feature of Spinoza's account of mind – the distinction between our position in the world metaphysically speaking and our awareness of that position. However, with desire alone, we have little explanation of just how we come to be aware of that which we are aware. On Descartes's account of mind, there is no need for such an explanation: thought itself is a primitive and is intrinsically conscious. For Spinoza, while thinking is intrinsically representational, it is not intrinsically conscious. How, then, do we become conscious of that which we are?

Joy and sadness provide the answer to this question. They explain how we become conscious of things and so self-consciously aware of our own position in the world. For Spinoza, joy is “that passion through which the mind passes to a greater perfection” or increases its power of thinking, and sadness is “that passion by which it passes to a lesser perfection” or decreases its power of thinking (3p11s). These increases and decreases in our power to persevere hone attention, informing our awareness so that our perspective on the world takes shape. In the propositions that immediately follow, 3p12–13, Spinoza explains the causes of our imagining what we do. It is not simply that we are causally impacted by an external thing and then take that thing to be present or imagine

it. Rather, what we imagine depends on how things affect us, that is, on how they impact our power to persevere or continue to exist.¹⁸ Spinoza says as much in 3p12, 3p13, and 3p13c:

The mind, as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting.
(3p12)

When the mind imagines those things that diminish or restrain the body's power of acting, it strives, as far as it can, to recollect things that exclude their existence.
(3p13)

From this it follows that the mind avoids imagining those things that diminish or restrain its or the body's power.
(3p13c)

Insofar as these propositions maintain that we become aware of that which increases our power to persevere in existence and, equally, put out of our mind those things which constrain our continued existence, they provide Spinoza's explanation of how we come to imagine, that is, to take as present to us, or to be conscious of, the things we do.

While love and hatred are not primary affects for Spinoza, they are introduced in the scholium of 3p13c and retain a special place in Spinoza's taxonomy for they are the first passions in which we imagine, that is, represent, external objects:

From this we understand clearly what love and hate are. *Love is nothing but joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause, and hate is nothing but sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause.* We see, then, that one who loves necessarily strives to have present and preserve the thing he loves; and on the other hand, one who hates strives to remove and destroy the thing he hates.
(3p13s)

I take the definitions of these passions to further indicate that our representations of objects as present to us are constituted by the ways in which things affect us, not simply perceptions that we then imbue with value.

With this picture in place, we can now understand why Spinoza dismisses wonder as an affect. Descartes's account of mind seems to presuppose that we have an array of ideas in mind, and without being able to assume any resemblance between those representations and things, the account needed to explain how we attend to some things rather than

others. Wonder provided that explanation within the Cartesian account. On Spinoza's view, objects are presented to us as present just in virtue of the ways in which we are affected. We have no need for a separate affect to explain what we attend to for attention and imagination are fully aligned, and they are both explained by the way things impact our power to persevere.

It is also worth noting that in Spinoza's taxonomy of primary affects, there is no highlighting of the temporality of thought. This too is consistent with the picture that Spinoza presents. Thinking, metaphysically speaking, is not in time insofar as it is, like Nature, eternal. Even the inadequate thinking of finite things is not intrinsically temporal for we only situate things in time once we have already imagined things as present and then associated those imaginations through the ways in which we are affected (see 2p18s and 3p18s).

If the interpretation I am presenting is correct, it brings out just how radical Spinoza's taxonomy of primary affects is. I have been demonstrating how a philosophical taxonomy of primitive passions highlights some basic structural features of thought. Each primitive passion marks an aspect – not unlike a Kantian category – essential to representational thought. Spinoza's pared down set of primary affects reflects the modesty of his conception of thought for on his account, even temporality is not intrinsic to our representations of objects. Moreover, for Spinoza, the primary affects do not simply highlight structural features of thought. They provide the structure through which we finite humans think, that is, through which we perceive objects in the world and thereby inform our perception. On Spinoza's account, desire subsumes within consciousness three structural features of representation that were taken to be distinct by Descartes: consciousness, an inclination to action, and value. Joy and sadness, as the increase and decrease of our power to persevere in existence, provide the mechanism through which we distinguish different elements of the causal nexus of which we are a part. Through them, we imagine the objects we do.

Notes

- 1 Amy Schmitter tells me it might not have to be that way. She unearthed a play, written in 1630, called *Pathomachia: or the Battle of the Affections* that dramatizes a taxonomy of passions.
- 2 See Voss (1981) for an interesting discussion of Spinoza's likely source: the Latin translation of the *Passions*, which was not approved by Descartes and which contains several significant variations from the French edition.
- 3 Following the citation practice in this volume, the reference to the Adam and Tannery edition of the *Oeuvres complètes* of Descartes are to Volume:page. When I rely on translations, Adam and Tannery edition reference is following by Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes* (1984–1991) [CSM and CSMK].
- 4 Brennan (2005) provides a helpful overview of Stoic accounts of emotion.

- 5 Knuuttila (2004, 243). Knuuttila's discussion of Aquinas's system (pp. 239–255) forms the basis of my brief summary here. See also King (2011).
- 6 There is another feature of the Thomist account worth noting. Though this taxonomy, in virtue of being a taxonomy, presents each of these passions as discrete possible states, the passions themselves do not seem to function discretely but rather are interconnected and work together. Consider the concupiscent passions. First, in feeling love or hatred, we perceive the value of an object, whether it is good (or attractive) or bad (or repulsive), but love leads us naturally to desire, and hate to aversion, that is, to move towards or away from the object. Moreover, in approaching the object we desire and love, we feel joy, just as we feel sadness in nearing that to which we are averse and hate. Conversely, we feel sadness in being apart from the object of our desire and love, and joy in being removed from that to which we are averse and hate. This movement, from one to the other to the next and back again, is how we experience the passions. We only rarely experience them discretely. Our movement through the passions parallels the movement of objects through these dimensions, and that movement helps in our cognition of these formal features. We hope to regain what we have loved and lost. We despair at the prospect that our beloved will remain remote. We rejoice when we find ourselves with the object of our love again. This cycling through the passions helps to pinpoint the value of things, not only in relation to us but also in relation to one another, and it makes more precise our situation in space and time.
- 7 I recognize that this interpretation of Aquinas demands a much more thorough defense, but this sketch is sufficient for my purposes here.
- 8 See Kambouchner (1995).
- 9 It appears that we are to arrive at the list of primitive passions by first surveying our experiences and then either breaking them down into their parts, much as we are to break down a problem that requires solution, or adducing from a variety of experiences a general point of commonality:

For by carrying out a review of all those I have enumerated, one can discover with ease that only six of them are of this kind [simple and primitive] . . . and all the others are composed of some of these six or are species of them.

(*Passions* art. 69, AT XI 380)

- 10 I do not mean to suggest that this is the *only* sense in which primitive passions are primitive. I mean only to suggest that highlighting structural features of our thought is *one* important sense in which they are primitive passions for Descartes. Kambouchner identifies three crucial points of Descartes's account. My interpretation is aligned with the third point, but let me mention the first two here. First, there are three senses of primitivity in play in the enumeration of the primitive passions: they are primitive in a logical sense, as generics in relation to all the others (the way in which Descartes himself presents the ordering); they are physiologically primitive, as the movements proper to these basic passions can be combined; and they are genetically primitive, as the primitive passions are the first ones felt (and the objects are various conditions of the blood), and all mature feelings develop from these original ones. Second, Descartes's mode of presentation is meant to bring out the *immediacy* with which we feel the passions, and in particular that our feelings of the passions do not presuppose that we have already differentiated objects to which we attach or direct our feelings. And third, and this is the point which I consider in the body of the paper, the primitive passions are psychologically primitive insofar as they are ideas, that is, *formally*; they

- are not psychologically primitive *objectively*, that is, insofar as they identify some basic ways of being self-aware.
- 11 Kambouchner distinguishes being psychologically primitive *formally* from being psychologically primitive *objectively*, that is, insofar as they identify some basic ways of being self-aware.
 - 12 That proof argues that while “corporeal things exist, they may not all exist in a way that exactly corresponds with my sensory grasp of them” (AT VII 80, CSM II 55). The insight that we “misuse them [our sensations] by treating them as reliable touchstones for immediate judgements about the essential nature of the bodies located outside me” (AT VII 83, CSM II 57–58) follows.
 - 13 Understanding desire in this way can help to explain why Descartes denies that aversion is a separate passion: aversion too clearly situates objects in space and time, and there is no need for duplication. The activity of our representing things as good or bad in relation to us provides another reason why aversion is not an opposite to desire. In representing something as good or bad in relation to us, we rely on one and the same norm.
 - 14 Descartes takes great pains here to distinguish the primitive passions of joy and sadness, those caused by the motions of the animal spirits, from an intellectual joy and sadness. It is hard to understand what he intends, but his point seems to be that in the primitive passions of joy, we represent immediately a good as proper to us. The two intellectual passions, though they are closely connected with their primitive cognates, arise from an opinion that a particular good or evil is our own, that is, they involve an intermediary step or a judgment.
 - 15 See Nadler (2006, 203–204).
 - 16 One might think of the distinction I am suggesting between appetite and desire as akin to the distinction drawn in Part 1 of the *Ethics* between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*.
 - 17 For more detailed discussions of Spinoza’s account of consciousness, see Nadler (2008), Garrett (2008), LeBuffe (2010), and Marshall (2013). 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.
 - 18 I argue for this claim in Shapiro (2017).

References

- Brennan, Tad. 2005. *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties and Fate*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garrett, Don. 2008. “Representation and Consciousness in Spinoza’s Naturalistic Theory of the Imagination,” in Huenemann (ed.), 4–25.
- Huenemann, Charlie. (ed.) 2008. *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kambouchner, Denis. 1995. *L’homme des passions*, 2 vols., Paris: Albin Michel.
- King, Peter. 2011. “Emotions,” in B. Davies and E. Stump (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 209–226.
- Knuuttila, Simo. 2004. *Emotions in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- LeBuffe, Michael. 2010. "Theories about Consciousness in Spinoza's Ethics." *Philosophical Review* 119(4): 531–563.
- Marshall, Eugene. 2013. *The Spiritual Automaton: Spinoza's Science of the Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nadler, Steven. 2006. *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nadler, Steven. 2008. "Spinoza and Consciousness." *Mind* 117(467): 575–601.
- Shapiro, Lisa. 2017. "Spinoza on the Association of Affects and the Workings of the Human Mind," in Y. Y. Melamed (ed.), *Spinoza's Ethics: A Critical Guide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 205–223.
- Voss, Stephen. 1981. "How Spinoza Enumerated the Affects." *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 63(2): 167–179.