

## 9 Self-Consciousness and Consciousness of Self

### Spinoza on Desire and Pride

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Spinoza, in his *Ethics*, presents an account that has finite human beings moving from a position of ignorance to one of knowledge—from inadequate ideas to adequate ideas, from passivity to activity, and from bondage to freedom. While there is much agreement about the general picture, just how we move away from our original position of ignorance is less clear. In thinking about this general question, commentators have tended to focus on understanding the conceptual relations that structure the question—the relations between ignorance and knowledge, inadequate and adequate ideas, passivity and activity, but also between knowledge and power (or activity), though less so between ignorance and passivity. Just what it is that is doing the moving has often gone missing in the discussion. Perhaps that oversight has been due to the apparent disappearance of any individual once the whole of Nature is grasped, as much as to interpreters' ambitions to arrive at that end sooner rather than later.

Lilli Alanen's work has been an exception to this, insofar as she has aimed to articulate how Spinoza thinks we move from being patients in the world to being agents, in understanding his account of the passions, and in particular the way in which he takes us to free ourselves from their bondage. In her paper "Spinoza on Passions and Self-Knowledge: The Case of Pride,"<sup>1</sup> Alanen asks whether it is the same individual moving from one point to the next along the path to freedom (or to knowledge or to adequate ideas or to power):

But is it that in understanding the causes of one's passive states, one becomes an agent with respect to those same states, or is it that increased activity in general so modifies the dynamics of the soul that the particular passion one suffered from, ceases to be, or, at least, ceases to be dominant?

(Alanen 2012, 235)

To answer this question, Alanen proposes to understand just what Spinoza takes the individual, the subject experiencing the affects to be, for in

understanding that subject, we can better see whether there is a continuity along the path to freedom.

The issue, however, is understanding just what the Spinozist subject is. Unlike for Descartes, there is no *res cogitans* whose very existence defines the subject, and also the individual. For Alanen, Spinoza's idea of the subject, that is, the self, is to be found in his account of *superbia*, or pride, and its companion concept *acquiescentia in se ipso*, or what is often translated as self-contentment. For Spinoza, while a finite thing is affected by other finite things, it need not either be aware of or represent what affects it. And equally, it need not be aware of or represent itself. It certainly need not represent itself veridically or adequately. This comes out clearly in his account of pride, and in experiencing self-contentment we correct at least some of those errors in our self-conception through a more adequate apprehension of the causal situation of the same individual. Thus, there does seem to be a continuity between the subject (and object) of pride and that of self-contentment as the distortions of the former are corrected in the latter. Alanen's question focuses on whether that continuity can be preserved in a complete apprehension of Nature, *sub specie aeternitatis*. That is, she considers the impact of the increase in understanding, and the move towards freedom, on the continuing existence of an individual. In this chapter I examine the smaller preliminary question of what it is for an individual to represent itself in the first place, for Spinoza.

I proceed in three steps. I look first at the primary affect of desire which Spinoza initially defines as a consciousness of appetite, and I aim to elucidate in just what this self-consciousness consists. I then turn to pride and *acquiescentia in se ipso* and distinguish them as varieties of consciousness of self. In clarifying the distinction between these two, I suggest, we can perhaps see the way towards freedom (and to true *acquiescentia in se ipso*) more clearly.

### 1. Desire: Self-Consciousness<sup>2</sup>

Spinoza first introduces and defines the concept of desire in the scholium to E3p9:

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; E3p9sch)<sup>3</sup>

Taken out of context in this way, the claim does not seem particularly problematic. We have all kinds of appetites through which we are moved

to preserve ourselves in existence. We experience desires, however, in so far as those natural impulses come to our attention. We are not simply moved towards food, but we *want* food, the late summer peach sitting on the table. But Spinoza's explication here must contain more than this. To see this we need to look a bit more closely at the immediate context of E3p9 as well as at the proposition itself.

In E3p6 Spinoza claims that "each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its own being," and in E3p7 he goes on to assert that this striving, or *conatus*, is "nothing but the actual essence of the thing." As introduced the notion of *conatus* is a wholly general concept, applying to each singular thing, irrespective of the attribute under which it is conceived. In E3p9, this general notion of *conatus* is expressly applied to a human 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 suo esse per severare*] and it is conscious of this striving it has [*hujus sui conatus est conscia*].

(GII 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,<sup>4</sup> 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.

The second claim of E3p9, that the mind is conscious of its own striving or *conatus*, is more challenging to understand, and it is this claim that complicates our understanding of desire. In the scholium, prior to the passage initially cited, Spinoza distinguishes between will and appetite.

Will is our striving referred to the mind alone; whereas the appetite is referred to mind and body together. Further, Spinoza defines appetite as “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. But if we are conscious of our appetites, how are desires any different from appetites?

I want to propose an answer to this puzzle. Note that Spinoza here uses two distinct, though, closely related terms: *consciuis* 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. *Consciuis* 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 is the movement or direction 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 the apple is good and direct myself towards it.<sup>6</sup>

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—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*. The relevant distinction here is between remaining implicit and having been made explicit. I inhabit my distinct perspective by simply moving about as I do—say, weaving through the other pedestrians on the sidewalk. I assert my perspective in calling attention to it—say, when I hold my ground against an oncoming pedestrian.<sup>7</sup>

Notice that though both our appetites and desires can be misguided—we can strive for things that ultimately undermine our continued existence—they are only misguided because of the interference of external

causes. In these cases, we experience the sadness of a diminished power to persevere. And in those cases in which our appetites and desires are satisfied, in which external causes cooperate with us and we continue to exist, we experience joy.

What is less clear is whether our desires can misconstrue our appetites. In his Definition of the Affects (DA), Spinoza defines desire: “Desire is man’s very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to do something” (DA1). In the explication, he identifies appetite and desire—“I really recognize no difference between human appetite and desire.” (DA1exp)—suggesting that there can be no room for error. Yet in the next sentence, Spinoza does open room for a gap between the two: “For whether a man is conscious of his appetite or not, the appetite still remains one and the same.” It seems, then, that though our appetites remain consistent, 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 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 E2p23) 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.

(GII 190; DA1exp; underlined emphasis added)

It seems then that our desire is that aspect of our essence, our striving to persevere, that is brought to our attention in virtue of the way we are affected by things (both internal and external). I take Spinoza’s point here to be that with desire, we have self-consciousness: That is, we are self-conscious from the particular perspective we find ourselves in the world.

## 2. Pride and *Acquiescentia in se ipso*: Consciousness of Self

Let me now turn to pride. Spinoza introduces the affect of pride or *superbia* in the scholium of E3p26. That proposition and the one preceding it (E3p25) are the first propositions in which Spinoza considers *our striving to affirm* what affects us with joy and to deny what affects us with sadness.

**E3p25:** We strive to affirm, concerning ourselves and what we love, whatever we imagine to affect with joy ourselves or what we love. On the other hand, we strive to deny whatever we imagine affects with sadness ourselves or what we love.

**E3p26:** We strive to affirm, concerning what we hate, whatever we imagine to affect it with sadness, and on the other hand to deny whatever we imagine to affect it with joy. (GII 159)

E3p25 follows from E3p21, which simply describes the way we *are* affected with joy in imagining things we love as affected with joy, in that we by our nature strive to imagine, to take as present, what affects us with joy (or increases our power of acting (E3p12)). E3p26 follows from E3p23 in a similar way, as that proposition simply describes *that* we take joy in imagining things that sadden what we hate.

The scholium of E3p26 takes the reflexive case as the first instance of this striving to affirm:

When this imagination concerns the man himself who thinks more highly of himself than is just, it is called pride [*superbia*], and is a species of madness, because the man dreams, with open eyes, that he can do all those things which he achieves only in his imagination, and which he therefore regards as real and triumphs in, so long as he cannot imagine those things which exclude the existence [of these achievements] and determine his power of acting.

(GII 159, E3p26s.)

At the end of the scholium, pride [*superbia*] is defined as the joy arising from our unjust (positive) estimation of ourselves. We can see how this works. Love is joy connected with an imagined object. Insofar as we love ourselves, we have joy with an imagination of ourselves. Pride, then, is an affirmation of a joy connected to an imagination of ourselves, or an affirmation of a love of ourselves. It focuses our attention on what we find empowering and distracts us from what might bring us down. In this way, pride effectively closes off our idea of ourselves from any countervailing evidence, and acts to amplify our self-love.

It is worth pausing to consider how ‘striving to affirm’ furthers Spinoza’s discussion. As I read the propositions 3p12–24, Spinoza is explaining how the way we are affected is tied to our perceptions of things, which in Spinoza’s terms, is simply our imagining what we do. Imagining, for Spinoza, is taking something to be present; that is, an imagination is an appearance of something. But in 2p49s, Spinoza denies that there is any distinction in having an idea and affirming it. That is just what it is to take something as present. Nonetheless, there does seem to be something added to our *striving* to affirm. In striving to affirm what we imagine, we further insist that appearances are the way things actually are. But of course, appearances can be deceiving. When we affirm what we imagine we can (and often do) go wrong. When we strive to affirm what we imagine, the risk of error only increases.

Spinoza's point about pride is twofold. First, pride is importantly different from desire, that is, our being conscious of our essence or striving to continue to exist. In pride, we imagine our self. That is, we appear to ourselves as a particular thing, with an array of properties. We affirm of ourselves that we have those properties, and moreover, strive to persist in that affirmation. Our imagining ourselves, just as our imagining other things is rooted in our being affected with joy and sadness, and following E3p25 and p26, we affirm what we imagine to affect us with joy and deny that which affects us with sadness. When we attribute to ourselves qualities that we take to empower us, that is, which bring us joy, we affirm those qualities of ourselves, just as we deny that we possess qualities that we take to weaken us. Spinoza's second point is that appearances of ourselves can be mistaken, even and perhaps especially those we strive to affirm. We can be wrong about what qualities we possess, we can be wrong about whether and the degree to which qualities empower or weaken us, we can be wrong about the sources of our joy and sadness. So we can be wrong about ourselves, that is wrong about what we are as individuals.

While Spinoza's discussion of pride makes self-knowledge seem somewhat hopeless, E3p30 provides a subtly different story of how we come to imagine ourselves.

If someone has done something which he imagines affects others with joy, he will be affected with joy accompanied by the idea of himself as cause, or he will regard himself with joy. If, on the other hand, he has done something which he imagines affects others with sadness, he will regard himself with sadness.

(GII 163, E3p30)

On the face of it, this proposition does not seem that different from the earlier propositions (E3p25 and p26) which also looked at what affects ourselves and others with joy and sadness, and which evoked a remark about our unjust assessments of things. However, the demonstration of E3p30 hangs on E3p27:

If we imagine a thing like us, *toward which we have had no affect*, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect.

(GII 160, E3p27, emphasis added)<sup>8</sup>

E3p25 and p26 presupposed that we loved or hated another thing. The key difference between this proposition and the others is whether there is some initial affective affinity between ourselves and another individual or not; E3p30 takes our connection to another to be merely one of resemblance. This resemblance alone is sufficient to cause what Spinoza terms an imitation of the affects, so that we feel joy at another's joy

(which does not seem to have a name), sadness upon another's sadness (pity), and desire upon another's desire (emulation). In the scholium and corollaries to 3p27, Spinoza goes on to detail how this imitation of the affects is achieved through our *imaginings* of the affective lives of others. Through this imaginative identification with others, we generate affects in ourselves—pity, emulation—through which we are moved to act on the others' behalf—the benevolence to free a suffering individual like us from the source of its suffering or on our own. Interestingly, *these* imaginings, the ones that begin from a position of affective indifference, do not seem to suffer the same distortions and mischaracterizations of those alluded to in the immediately preceding propositions (those concerning pride). It seems that the lack of a strong prior affective relationship between ourselves and others allows for our imagination to be less distorted. These imaginations of affective responses of others are not complicated by the affective relations we stand in to them, but rather are a matter of the imagined resemblances between us.

The demonstration of E3p30 continues by noting that “man is conscious of himself through the affections by which he is determined to act,” (appealing to 2p19 and 2p23), and from there concluding that “he who has done something which he imagines affects others with joy will be affected with joy, together with a consciousness of himself as the cause, or he will regard himself with joy, and the converse” (G II 163, E3p30dem). What Spinoza seems to intend here is that in order to imagine oneself as the cause of another's joy one must oneself be affected with joy and aware of that joy—for seeing oneself as a cause entails one's own power (which just is joy)—and equally that one can become aware of one's own joy, and so of one's power, by seeing oneself as the cause of another's joy. For the scholium of E3P30 notes that this joy insofar as it is accompanied with an idea of an *internal* cause (rather than of an external cause) is not, properly speaking love, but rather *acquiescentia in se ipso*.

Spinoza is often read here as articulating an alternative to *superbia*, contrasting a proper sense of self with the inflated and distorted sense of self of pride. But the scholium concludes with a remark that one can go wrong in experiencing *acquiescentia in se ipso* too. One can be mistaken that one is bringing joy to others—in fact, one can be ‘burdensome’ to all. This sense of how we can go wrong is reiterated in E3p51s, as is the definition of self-esteem. In that proposition Spinoza notes not only can we each be affected differently than others by the same object, we each can be differently ourselves at different times. Insofar as our judgments derive from affects, and because our affects are inconstant, we can go wrong. And equally we can go wrong because we often only imagine what will bring joy and sadness. This is the case as much in cases of repentance, when we see ourselves as cause of sadness, as it is in self-esteem, when we see ourselves as cause of joy. So it is not simply that *acquiescentia in se ipso* is correct while *superbia* is wrong.

Rather what distinguishes the two is the *basis* for our self-conception. Pride or *superbia*, in virtue of its foundation in how we are affected by things, effectively involves taking credit for something that while ours, comes to us from outside of us, and so is beyond what is properly ours. It is as if we are in an echo chamber, in which an initial peep bounces off the walls to become a much bigger sound that drowns out everything else. *Acquiescentia in se ipso* derives not from how we are affected, but rather from how we affect others, and infers from those effects to our own power as a cause. *Acquiescentia in se ipso* is often translated as self-esteem but quite literally it means to become or to rest in oneself. To rest in oneself or become oneself for Spinoza is to begin to grasp oneself as a cause.

It is worth noting that the distinction between these two senses of self is not as stark as it is sometimes painted to be. In E3p55s Spinoza seems to connect self-esteem and *superbia*:

But joy arising from considering ourselves is called self-love or self-esteem. And since this is renewed as often as a man considers his virtues, or his power of acting, it also happens that everyone is anxious to tell his own deeds, and show off his powers, both of body and of mind and that men, for this reason are troublesome to one another. (GII 183, E3p55s)

And he goes on to note that our natural envy leads us to find joy in others' weakness and to find singularity in our own actions (a uniqueness which seems to indicate our own perfection in that if we alone exhibit the effect, we must be the sole cause of it). Even if we recognize that our power is the proper measure of our value, we can find ways to exaggerate that power with respect to the powers of others. Nonetheless, there remains an important difference between *superbia* and *acquiescentia in se ipso*: the former arises from affirming an affective response; the latter arises from a consideration of the causal relations in which we stand.

### 3. Different Senses of Self-consciousness and the Power of Imagination

My aim so far has been somewhat modest: to bring out different senses of self-awareness or self-consciousness in operation within Part 3 of Spinoza's *Ethics*. In being the particular finite things we are, we strive to persevere, or have appetites that move us to continue in existence. Insofar as we are so moved, we are conscious of our essence or striving. But as we are affected by external things, we are focused on different aspects of our essence. Our desires are just this selective direction to what it takes to continue to exist at any given moment. Desires still involve a consciousness of our essence, but, as with appetites, this

consciousness does not take our essence as an object for examination, but rather intrinsically involves awareness of our distinctive perspective in being moved to *pursue* something. Insofar as our consciousness of our appetites, our desires, are caused by our being affected (DA 1),<sup>9</sup> our desires always involve a selective direction, and so are necessarily inadequate ideas, intrinsically incomplete reflections of our essence and so erroneous.

Pride involves a different species of self-consciousness, what might be better called consciousness of self. That is, we imagine ourselves and thereby take ourselves as an object present to us, ascribing ourselves properties, and powers. *Aquiescentia in se ipso* also involves this imagination of a self. But there is an important difference between the two.

With pride, our consciousness of self derives from our affective relations to others and the ways in which they reflect back on us. We love something (that is, it brings us joy), and some other thing brings it joy, and so we in turn love what brings that joy to our beloved. I feel pride when what brings joy to my beloved is just me. So my beloved brings me joy, in virtue of its being my beloved, and its joy in me, makes me love myself. My own feelings of empowerment are amplified in reflection. But that amplification has no grounding in any power that I actually have. It is simply the sense of self that comes when those I like because of the way they affect me feel me back. While this sense of self can be a good thing, there are a litany of standard cases where it runs amok—the cliques that invariably take over high school social orders, the politician that surrounds himself with yes-men, and so on.

*Aquiescentia in se ipso* also provides a conception of self, but in this case, while we derive our imagination of self from the affective response of others to us, those others stand at an affective remove. They might resemble us, but they (as yet) do not stand to benefit or harm us in our continued existence in any way. In seeing ourselves—our power—in others we do not have our own measure of valuation reflected back upon us, but rather are able to gain a degree of objectivity of how we affect others, that is, of the causal relations that we stand in to them. We can here also be mistaken about ourselves. But Spinoza seems to suggest that our errors here are not about the fact of our power, but about its degree, or rather the degree to which we are unique in possessing that power. We need to work on placing our power in perspective to the other powers that be. I take it that Spinoza's point here is that we can never get to any kind of knowledge of nature if we remain in the echo chamber of our affective responses. We stand a chance, however, if we begin to grasp the reasons we affect things as we do. Once we understand our own causal efficacy, we can use that as the lever through which to understand the causal efficacy of others, and so begin to grasp the causal order as a whole.

#### 4. Conclusion: Self-consciousness, Consciousness of Self, and Self-perfection

Alanen's interest in pride and in *aquiescentia in se ipso* rests in the question of how we can move from the imperfect consciousness of self to the domain of adequate ideas that is the end of the *Ethics*. For it is there that Spinoza introduces yet another dimension: *true* self-esteem. I have focused on the beginning of the story, and I have tried to lay out the complicated role imagination plays in our efforts to improve ourselves. We begin to have an idea of ourselves (as an object) in relations to others through our ideas of them and of the ways in which we are affected by them. But these initial self-conceptions, insofar as they are derived wholly from the ways in which things affect us, are necessarily distorted (and usually exaggerated in our favor). Our imagination of our selves begins to be corrected once we find ourselves in a situation where we stand in relation to things—through resemblance—by which we have been previously unaffected. In this kind of laboratory environment we can get a perspective on (be affected by) how we affect others like us and so take a measure of our own power. Even here, while we might have a better grip on our own abilities, we are prone to error about the relation our own power with respect to that of others. We can see then how lending structure to our relationships with others—the work of Part 4 of the *Ethics*—can assist in our gaining better perspective on ourselves.

This story is consistent with the way in which Spinoza characterizes the 'remedy of the affects' in the first half of Part 5 of the *Ethics*. There, Spinoza notes that "each us of us has—in part, at least, if not absolutely—the power to understand himself and his affects, and consequently, the power to bring it about that he is less acted on by them" (GII 283, E5p4s), that is, "we have the power of ordering and connecting the affections of the body according to the order of the intellect" (E5p10). In determining the order and connection of ourselves to others and in particular to others like us, we both come to know the world and come to know ourselves, and through that knowledge finding ourselves to be less affected by things. As Spinoza further notes, however, "so long as we do not have perfect knowledge of our affects" we do best

to conceive a correct principle of living, *or* sure maxims of life, to commit them to memory, and to apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered in life. In this way our imagination will be extensively affected by them, and we shall always have them ready.

(GII 287, E5p10s)

Under conditions of imperfect knowledge, we are to continue to rely on our imagination to steer us towards virtue. For the maxims we devise

for conducting ourselves while approximating reason, themselves affect us and thereby impact our temperament and so the effects of passive affects.<sup>10</sup> Insofar as these maxims involve the imagination, it is worth highlighting, they also not only presuppose our particular perspective as individuals—what it is to imagine to take things as present *to us*—but they also involve our imagining ourselves as the same individual over time. For in putting forward these maxims we are asserting ourselves as the individuals we are and as those individuals gaining control of the way in which we are affected by things.

However, Spinoza maintains that “the greatest satisfaction of mind there can be arises from this third kind of knowledge” (GII 297, E5p27), that is, from what in E2p40s2 is defined as the “intuitive knowledge. . . [that] proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things” (GII 122, E2p40s2). The question that remains is whether the mind that experiences this joy and intellectual love of God is the mind of a particular individual, and indeed the same individual who began the process of arriving at understanding with imperfect and inadequate ideas of imagination. In E5p36, Spinoza maintains that “the mind’s intellectual love of God is the very love of God by which God loves himself,” which suggests that the mind that intuits is not the mind of a particular individual. However, the proposition continues, clarifying that “it is not insofar as it [God] is infinite, but insofar as it can be explained by the human mind’s essence, considered *sub specie aeternitatis*” (GII 302, E5p36). While less than clear, this does seem to entail that intellectual love of God entails an apprehension of the determinate thing that is the human mind—as Spinoza puts it in the demonstration, this love is “an action by which the mind contemplates [*contemplatur*] itself, with the accompanying idea of God as its cause” (*ibid.*), which is the same action “as that by God insofar as it can be explained through the human mind, contemplates itself, with the accompanying idea of itself” (*ibid.*).<sup>11</sup>

One might well wonder just how the action whereby the mind contemplates itself can be the same as that whereby God contemplates itself. It should be clear that whatever God’s contemplation is, it is not an act of imagination, and so the mind in contemplating itself does not imagine itself, that is, present itself as an object. In this regard, it is interesting to note Spinoza’s language at the very end of the work. In the E5p42s, in contrasting the ignorant and the wise person he writes:

For not only is the ignorant man troubled in many ways by external causes, and unable ever to possess true peace of mind [*vera animi acquiescentia*], but also lives as if he knew neither himself, nor God, nor things; and as soon as he ceases to be acted on, he ceases to be. On the other hand, the wise man, insofar as he is considered as such, is hardly troubled in spirit, but being, by a certain eternal necessity, *conscious*

of himself, and of God, and of things, he never ceases to be [*sed sui, & Dei & rerum aeterna quadam necessitate conscius, nunquam esse desinit*] but also possess true peace of mind [*vera animi acquiescentia*].

If I am correct that the term ‘*consci*us’ connotes an awareness that does not yet entail that determinate object of awareness that comes from turning attention to one’s awareness, we can see the end of Spinoza’s *Ethics* as a simple apprehension of the desire, the *conatus*, through which we strive to persevere, to keep in tune with the causal order. There is a sense in which this desire can be called a self, for it constitutes our essence, and there is a further sense in which it is also the same self as that which we so poorly understand in our ignorance. However, insofar as the imaginative understanding we have of ourselves is imperfect, there is also a sense in which the self we imagine ourselves to be, whether it be in pride or in an appropriate self-contentment, is wholly different from that of our intuitive understanding.

## Notes

- 1 Alanen (2012) in *Emotion and Cognitive Life in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*. Her thoughts on this topic are continued in Alanen 2017.
- 2 The discussion in this section is taken from Shapiro 2017.
- 3 All citations from Spinoza refer first to Spinoza 1925, (by ‘G’ followed by volume and page). English translations are from Spinoza (1985, 2016) with occasional modifications. For citations from the *Ethics*, I use the following abbreviations: the first numeral refers to part; ‘p’ means proposition; ‘d’ means definition; ‘c’ means corollary; ‘s’ means scholium, ‘dem’ means demonstration, ‘exp’ means explication; e.g., 3p9s means *Ethics*, part 3, proposition 9, scholium.
- 4 It is not clear whether there are any other ideas he takes to be conceived adequately by the human mind.
- 5 The distinction I am suggesting exists between appetite and desire as akin to that drawn between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata* in Part 1 of the *Ethics*. *Natura naturans* is that way of being Nature is that proper to a substance and so “what is in itself and is conceived through itself,” whereas *Natura naturata* concerns what follows from Nature, that is, the modes of God’s attributes, which “can neither be nor be conceived without God” (GII 71, E1p29sch). Clearly, the human mind is not a substance, but rather a mode of Nature within Spinoza’s metaphysics, so there must be important differences. Nonetheless, it might be helpful to think of desires as if they are modes of appetites, insofar as this way of thinking helps in understanding different senses of self-knowledge in play. Insofar as we are modes of God, we are God and have divine knowledge, but insofar as we are only modes of God, that knowledge is partial. Insofar as our appetites constitute our essence, they define us as the complete individuals we are, and it must be that in just being what we are we have knowledge of our nature. But similar to the way we as modes have incomplete knowledge of God, so too our desires afford us incomplete awareness of our essence or appetites.
- 6 For more detailed discussions of Spinoza’s account of consciousness, see Naddler 2008; Garrett 2008; LeBuffe 2010; Marshall 2013. These accounts focus

- on how Spinoza conceives of consciousness, and its relation to thought. My own view is aligned more with Garrett and Marshall.
- 7 I am thinking of the antihero in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* here.
- 8 Spinoza here seems to be examining a scenario that is something like the converse of E3p16: "From the mere fact that we imagine a thing to have some likeness to an object which usually affects the mind with joy or sadness, we love it or hate it, even though that in which the thing is like the object is not the efficient cause of those affects" (GII 152–53, E3p16). In E3p27, what is central is the imagined likeness of things to us: that imagined likeness alone is enough to generate affects in us. In E3p16, the claim is that being affected by a thing is primary, and that affect is sufficient to generate similar feeling towards other things we imagine to be like it.
- 9 "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" (GII 190, DA 1, emphasis added).
- 10 Spinoza seems to think that if we practice following the rules we set for ourselves, we will "soon be able to direct most of [our] actions according to the command of reason" (GII 289, E5p10s), thus faking it until we make it.
- 11 I have modified Curley's translation here. Curley assigns God a personal pronoun—"he" and "himself"—which obscures what is at stake interpretively here. I prefer the neutral "it" and "itself" to refer to God or the whole of Nature.

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