



Spinoza's Theory of Ideas

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SPINOZA'S THEORY OF IDEAS

THE THEORY of ideas found in Part II of the *Ethics* has been severely attacked. The theory may be rescued from at least some of the objections to it if it is interpreted as an attempt to overcome certain difficulties raised by the Cartesian form of representationalism. The first section of this paper gives a brief statement of Spinoza's theory of ideas and an account of some of the criticisms that have been directed against it. The second section presents two basic problems in the Cartesian theory of ideas, which are taken to be the motivations of Spinoza's theory. The third section shows how Spinoza attempts to solve one of these problems by introducing a distinction between the object of an idea and the thing represented by an idea. The fourth section is an examination of Spinoza's theory of the adequacy of ideas as an attempt to solve the other problem. The final section concerns Spinoza's classification of adequate and inadequate ideas.

I

In Part II of the *Ethics* Spinoza considers the nature of the human mind and its relation to the human body. He argues that the relation between the mind and the body is the same as that between an idea and its object, since the mind is nothing but that idea of the body which exists in the infinite intellect of God. Just as the human body is a highly complex individual, consisting of many individuals of different kinds, so the mind is a highly complex idea, consisting of many ideas. Each of the ideas of which the human mind is composed is the idea of some affection of the human body; and for each affection of the human body, there is an idea of it in the mind. All that the mind perceives it perceives by means of the ideas of the affections of its own body. For example, when the mind perceives the sun, the idea by means of which it perceives the sun is the idea of the human body as affected by the sun. The mind knows external bodies,

itself, and the human body only by means of its ideas of the affections of the human body. Thus it has inadequate knowledge or ideas of these things. The things of which the mind has adequate knowledge or ideas include that which is common to all bodies and "the eternal and infinite essence of God." One can determine the adequacy of these ideas without reference to the things of which they are the ideas.

Among critics' objections to this theory are the following. First of all, the word "idea" is used ambiguously. H. Barker criticizes Spinoza for his "use of the one and the same word *idea* to denote sometimes *conceptus*, sometimes *mens*."¹ Similarly, A. E. Taylor objects to "the standing and apparently unconscious Spinozistic equivocation by which 'the idea of Peter' may mean either 'the mental complex which corresponds to Peter's brain and nervous system, the mind of Peter,' or 'the mental complex which exists when Paul thinks of Peter, Paul's "idea" of Peter.'"² Celestine Sullivan's version of the criticism is that "Spinoza employs the term 'idea' to mean simply the form or nature of a mode of extension, while yet he also means ambiguously by this same term 'idea' an element in the conscious life of man."³ In the latter two statements, an idea in the first sense is something whose *ideatum* is the human body, or else something in the mind whose *ideatum* is some aspect of the human body; while an idea in the second sense is something in the mind whose *ideatum* may be an external body. To illustrate by means of the previous example of the mind perceiving the sun, the idea in the second sense is the idea of the sun; while the idea in the first sense is the idea of the human body as affected by the sun.

Spinoza himself points out this ambiguity in the Scholium to Proposition 17, but he is not always careful to take it into account. In particular, his demonstration of Proposition 13, that "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is a body . . .

¹ Barker, "Notes on the Second Part of Spinoza's *Ethics*," *Mind*, XLVII (1938), 418.

² Taylor, "Some Incoherencies in Spinozism," *Mind*, XLVI (1937), 153.

³ Sullivan, "Critical and Historical Reflections on Spinoza's 'Ethics,'" *University of California Publications in Philosophy*, XXXII (1958), 3.

actually existing, and nothing else,"⁴ is based upon a confusion of the two senses of the word "idea." In order to support the final step of the demonstration, that the object of the idea constituting the human mind is an existing body, *and nothing else*, Spinoza appeals to Axiom 5, which says in effect that we have no other ideas except those of bodies and of modes of thought. Our ideas of bodies and of modes of thought are *ideas* in the second sense of the word, however, while the mind as the idea of a particular body is an *idea* in the first sense of the word. The fact that we have no other ideas (in the second sense) besides those of bodies and modes of thought does not serve to demonstrate that the object of the idea (in the first sense) which constitutes the mind is nothing else than a particular existing body.

A further criticism of Spinoza's theory of ideas concerns the claim that the mind knows external bodies only by means of the ideas of its own bodily affections. According to Barker and James Martineau, this claim involves a confusion of the process by which we come to have ideas with the relation that an idea has with its object. Spinoza accepts the scientific doctrine that we perceive external bodies only in so far as they affect our own body. He appeals to this doctrine in support of his contention that the ideas by which we perceive external bodies are ideas whose objects are the affections of our own body. This approach reveals his failure to distinguish between the conditions for having an idea and the object of the idea. In order that we may perceive an external body, our own body must be affected in a certain way; but the object of our idea is not our body thus affected.⁵

Critics have also attacked Spinoza for his notion of the adequacy of ideas. First of all, they object to his claim that it is possible to determine whether an idea is adequate, without referring the idea to that of which it is the idea. They insist that Spinoza, in his attempt to provide an internal mark of adequacy,

⁴ Quotations are from the W. H. White translation of the *Ethics*. For the sake of brevity, Spinoza's citation of proposition and axiom numbers will be deleted, unless required for purposes of discussion.

⁵ Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 295-300; Martineau, *A Study of Spinoza* (London, 1882), pp. 138-139.

overlooks the inescapable fact that ideas are ideas of things other than themselves. Barker puts the objection as follows:

Spinoza . . . introduced the definition of an adequate idea in II, because, in view of the complete independence of the attributes he wished to insist that there is a wholly internal criterion of the truth of an idea But . . . he does not really escape the external reference of ideas, for (1) they know their ideata, (2) they correspond to their ideata.⁶

Likewise, Taylor insists that any attempt, such as Spinoza's, to "treat of knowing without ever introducing the reference to anything non-mental which is a known object" will invariably fail, because "no account can be given of knowing with the least vestige of plausibility which ignores the most patent characteristic of knowing, *viz.* that it is always the knowing of an object other than itself."⁷

Second, critics object to Spinoza's view that ideas may be inadequate in one context and adequate in another. Spinoza allows that some ideas are inadequate in the human mind (*E. II*, 24-31); yet he insists that "All ideas . . . in so far as they are related to God are true and adequate" (*E. II*, 36 Dem.). Apparently, then, he believes that those same ideas which are inadequate in the human mind are adequate when they are related to God. Barker finds this position untenable, for the following reason. In order that an inadequate idea may be adequate in relation to God, there must be some alteration in the content of the idea. Thus the idea which is inadequate in the human mind and the idea which is adequate when related to God are not one and the same. Barker writes:

The ideas which are inadequate in man must surely undergo a change in order to become adequate in the *intellectus infinitus* Or, conversely, ideas which are adequate in the *intellectus infinitus* must undergo a change in order to have a place as inadequate ideas in the mind of man, a change which implies not merely a diminution but a distortion.

⁶ Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 433.

⁷ Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

In other words, the ideas which are adequate in one reference and inadequate in another are not the same ideas.⁸

A final difficulty with regard to Spinoza's notion of adequacy is this. Given that there is an exact correspondence between ideas and the things of which they are the ideas (*E. II, 7*), how can there be inadequate ideas at all? Barker challenges Spinoza with the following dilemma:

If ideas agree with their ideata and are true, they cannot be confused and inadequate. If they are confused and inadequate, they cannot agree with their ideata and be true.⁹

Why does Spinoza put forth a theory of ideas that is open to such obvious and serious criticisms? Most philosophical theories are developed to solve particular philosophical problems. A theory which solves no problems and which is beset with difficulties in its own right deserves little consideration. A theory which is put forth to solve certain philosophical problems at least deserves an evaluation in terms of whether it solves the problems it is meant to solve.

Spinoza's theory of ideas may be taken as an attempt to improve upon the Cartesian account of the relation of ideas to the things they represent. When the theory is taken in this light, the objections noted above are not so insurmountable as they first appear. In particular, the two senses of "idea" constitute, not an unconscious equivocation, but a deliberate attempt to give a more satisfactory account of the representation relation than Descartes was able to offer. The alleged confusion of the object of the idea with the conditions for having the idea disappears, as the idea takes on two distinct relations to the things external to it. The difficulties concerning the adequacy of ideas are overcome when the notion of adequacy is assigned the proper role in Spinoza's representationalism. But before we examine how Spinoza attempts to overcome the difficulties raised by the Cartesian theory of ideas, let us first give brief consideration to the Cartesian theory itself and the problems to which it gives rise.

⁸ Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 438.

⁹ *Ibid.*

II

According to Descartes, when the mind thinks of something external to it, the situation may be analyzed as follows. First of all, there is the mind or the substance which thinks. Second, there is the act of thinking, which is a modification of the mind. Third, there is the content of thought or that of which the mind is directly aware in the act of thinking. This content of thought, or *idea*,¹⁰ is something mental and is representative of something else which is nonmental. Finally, there is the nonmental thing which is represented in the idea. This nonmental thing is called the *object* of the idea. That which is in the object of the idea *formally* is in the idea itself *objectively* or "by representation."¹¹

Why does the cognitive situation require the presence of an idea, which is distinct from and representative of the object? The reason is this. All that the mind knows, it knows by means of that of which it is directly aware. The only things of which the mind is directly aware are things which are immediately present to the mind. The only things which are immediately present to the mind are mental things or things which are in some way *in* the mind. Thus all that the mind knows, it knows by means of that which is in the mind. Now the mind is commonly said to know nonmental things. Its knowledge of nonmental things must take place by means of its direct awareness of things in the mind. Thus the mind knows nonmental things by means of its ideas, which are representations in the mind of nonmental things.

If the mind knows the objects of its ideas only by means of its ideas, how can it distinguish between ideas which represent their objects as they really are and ideas which do not? For example, suppose I have the idea of a material body as something capable of motion and rest. How do I know whether the body really is capable of motion and rest? Again, suppose I have the idea of a material body as something colored. How do I know

¹⁰ I overlook the ambiguity in Descartes's use of the word "idea," whereby he uses it to refer both to the act of thinking and to the content of thought. My concern here is not so much to give an accurate statement of Descartes's theory, as to outline it as Spinoza seems to have understood it.

¹¹ Haldane and Ross (trans.), *Philosophical Works of Descartes*, I, 162 (hereafter cited as *H.R.*).

whether color really belongs to the body? Since I am not directly acquainted with the material body itself, but know it only by means of my idea of it, I cannot compare my idea of the body with the body itself in order to see whether my idea represents the body accurately. Descartes's response to this problem is to appeal to the principle that whatever is clearly and distinctly conceived is true. Those ideas which are clear and distinct give accurate representations of their objects, while those which are obscure and confused do not. Thus it is possible to determine which ideas represent things as they really are, without any need of direct comparison of the ideas with their objects. Clearness and distinctness are defined independently of the relation which the idea has to its object. Once it is established that an idea has the internal characteristics of clearness and distinctness, one may be assured that the idea gives an accurate representation of its object or, in Descartes's terms, that the idea is true.

The way in which Descartes separates the clearness and distinctness of ideas from the accuracy with which they represent their objects raises one set of difficulties for the Cartesian theory of ideas. (a) How does one determine which ideas are clear and distinct and which are obscure and confused? The question of whether or not an idea is clear and distinct must be answered before one can answer the question of whether or not the idea is true. Hence in ascertaining the clearness and distinctness of an idea, one cannot presuppose that the idea is true. (b) Given that it is established that an idea is clear and distinct, how does one know that the idea is true? The principle that clear and distinct ideas are true is not itself a self-evident truth. Descartes supports this principle by an appeal to the veracity of God. Thus, having inserted a skeptical wedge between the clearness and distinctness of ideas and their truth, Descartes must supply a method of ascertaining clearness and distinctness which can be implemented without reference to truth;¹² and he is then obliged to bridge the gap between the clearness and distinctness of ideas and their truth by means of a divine guarantee.

¹² For an examination of Descartes's response to this difficulty, see Alan Gewirth's article, "Clearness and Distinctness in Descartes," *Philosophy*, XVIII (1943), 17-36.

A further difficulty for the Cartesian theory concerns the nature of the representation relation. How do ideas represent their objects? Descartes seems to consider representation as a kind of resemblance or likeness between an idea and its object. An idea represents its object, by resembling it in some way. Thus in the *Third Meditation* he speaks of ideas as being "like [pictures or] images" of their objects.¹³ Similarly, in the *Reply to the Second Objections*, he says that what is in the idea objectively, by virtue of being represented by the idea, is in the object itself formally, if "the way in which it exists in the object is exactly like what we know of it when aware of it."¹⁴ In order for there to be a resemblance or likeness between two distinct things, however, the two things must have something in common. What is there in common between an idea and a material object? Ideas belong to the realm of thought, material things to the realm of extension; and "there is nothing at all common to thought and extension."¹⁵ If there is nothing in common between ideas and their objects, then there can be no resemblance between them. But if there is no resemblance between ideas and their objects, how do ideas represent their objects? Having introduced a total disparity between the mental and the material, Descartes must provide an explanation of how an idea can represent a material object without resembling it.¹⁶

Spinoza attempts to rescue the representative theory of ideas from difficulties such as these. In answer to the question of how ideas represent their objects, he offers an explanation of representation which does not make it a kind of resemblance between the mental and the material. As for the problems arising from the separation of clearness and distinctness from truth, Spinoza attempts to undercut them by establishing a necessary connection between the internal characteristics of ideas and the accuracy with which they represent their objects.

¹³ *H.R.* I, 163.

¹⁴ *H.R.* II, 53.

¹⁵ *H.R.* II, 212.

¹⁶ For an examination of other Cartesians' attempts to solve this problem, see Richard A. Watson's *The Downfall of Cartesianism: 1673-1712* (The Hague, 1966).

III

Spinoza agrees with Descartes that the mental and the material are totally distinct realms; that we are directly aware only of things in the mental realm; and that we can have knowledge of material things by means of ideas which represent them. How do ideas represent material things? The key to Spinoza's theory of the nature of representation is his distinction between the object of the idea and that which the idea represents. The term "the object of the idea" is not synonymous with the term "that which is represented by the idea," although in some cases the two terms have the same reference. The object and the thing represented stand in two different relations to the idea. The relation between the idea and its object is explicated in terms of the distinction between objective and formal reality. The relation between the idea and what it represents is explicated in terms of the resemblance of the thing represented to the object of the idea.

The object of the idea and the idea are related as formal reality to objective reality. A thing has formal reality in so far as it exists in itself, and objective reality in so far as it is thought of. This version of the distinction between objective and formal reality is found in the following passage from Descartes's *Reply to the First Objections*:

Hence the idea of the sun will be the sun itself existing in the mind, not indeed formally, as it exists in the sky, but objectively, i.e. in the way in which objects are wont to exist in the mind.¹⁷

Spinoza understands the distinction between objective and formal reality as it is expressed in this passage. According to Spinoza, all individual things are modes of the one substance, and they are all thought of by the one substance. For everything that exists, there is an idea of it in the infinite intellect. In Spinoza's words, "whatever follows *formally* from the infinite nature of God, follows from the idea of God [*idea Dei*] in the same order and in the same connection *objectively* in God" (*E. II, 7 Cor.*). And for every idea in the infinite intellect, there is an existing thing

¹⁷ *H.R.* II, 10.

which is its object. In Spinoza's words, "that which is objectively contained in the intellect must necessarily exist in nature" (*E. I*, 30 Dem.). The realm of ideas and the realm of objects are coextensive, because it is one and the same thing which exists both objectively and formally. Spinoza writes:

Thus, also, a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, expressed in two different ways For example, the circle existing in nature and the idea that is in God of an existing circle are one and the same thing, which is manifested through different attributes [*E. II*, 7 Schol.].

In so far as the individual thing exists formally, it is considered "under the attribute of extension." In so far as it exists objectively, it is considered "under the attribute of thought."

The human body is a finite mode of the attribute of extension. There is an idea of it in the infinite intellect of God. This idea is the human mind. Since a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, the human body and the human mind are one and the same thing, viewed on the one hand under the attribute of extension and on the other hand under the attribute of thought. The human body consists of many parts, which are affected in many ways. The mind, as the objective reality of the body, contains ideas of all the ways in which the body is affected. In Spinoza's words, "the ideas of the affections of the body are in God in so far as He forms the nature of the human mind" (*E. II*, 19 Dem.).

Just as there are in God ideas of the human body and its affections, so there are also in God ideas of all other material bodies. These ideas bear the same relation to their objects as the mind bears to the body.

For of everything there necessarily exists in God an idea of which He is the cause, in the same way as the idea of the human body exists in Him; and therefore everything that we have said of the idea of the human body is necessarily true of the idea of any other thing [*E. II*, 13 Schol.].

For example, there is in God the idea of the sun, and this idea constitutes the objective reality of the sun.

Descartes would say that when we perceive an external body, we have an idea of that body—that is, an idea of that body is present in our mind. Spinoza sometimes adopts this usage. For example, in *Ethics* II, Proposition 16, Corollary 2, he speaks of “the ideas we have of external bodies.” Similarly, in the Scholium to Proposition 17 he speaks of “the idea of Peter himself which is in another man” when the other man perceives Peter. For Spinoza, as for Descartes, our idea of an external body is that idea in our mind which represents the external body to us. But Spinoza, unlike Descartes, distinguishes between the idea which represents the external body to us and the idea whose object is the external body. In Spinoza’s system we do not perceive external bodies by means of ideas whose objects are external bodies, since such ideas are not in our mind. The only ideas in the human mind are ideas whose objects are the affections of the human body, and external bodies are not affections of the human body. Since we perceive external bodies only by means of ideas which are in our mind, we perceive them by means of the ideas of our affections. Thus Spinoza says that the ideas of our affections “represent to us external bodies” (*E.* II, 17 Schol.; III, 27 Dem.).

Representation for Spinoza is a matter of *making known*, and it is always with respect to a particular knower. Idea *X* represents object *Y* to knower *K*, just in case *X* makes *Y* known to *K*. How can the idea of our bodily affections make external bodies known to us? Spinoza’s answer is that since external bodies are causes of our affections, our affections have something in common with external bodies, and thus the ideas of our affections “involve the nature” of external bodies.

Spinoza adopts the Cartesian principle that there is nothing in the effect which did not first exist in the cause. Whatever is in the effect must have been present in the cause; otherwise “whatsoever it might have, it would have from nothing.”¹⁸ Thus, given that one knows that the effect has property *P*, one may infer that the

¹⁸ A. Wolf (trans. and ed.), *The Correspondence of Spinoza*, Letter IV, 83. Cf. *H.R.* I, 162; II, 34-35.

cause also has property *P*. In this way "the knowledge (*cognitio*) of an effect . . . involves the knowledge of the cause" (*E. I*, Ax. 4).

The affections of the human body are produced by the action of external bodies upon the parts of the human body. In *Ethics II*, Postulate 3, Spinoza writes:

The individuals composing the human body, and consequently the human body itself, are affected by external bodies in many ways.

Since that which is in the effect must first be present in the cause, and since the affections of the human body have external bodies as their cause, the affections have something in common with external bodies. Thus the idea of each affection is the idea of something which is present, not only in the human body, but also in external bodies. Spinoza writes:

The idea of every way in which the human body is affected by external bodies must involve the nature of the human body, and at the same time the nature of the external body [*E. II*, 16].

Because the ideas of the affections of our body involve the nature of external bodies, they can serve to represent external bodies to us. In Spinoza's words, "the human mind perceives the nature of many bodies together with that of its own body" (*E. II*, 16 Cor. 1). Nevertheless, the ideas which represent external bodies to us have as their objects the affections of the human body. In Spinoza's words, "the ideas we have of external bodies indicate the constitution of our own body rather than the nature of external bodies" (*E. II*, 16 Cor. 2).

The ideas of our bodily affections do not represent external bodies by being mental pictures or images of them. These ideas represent external bodies to us, by containing objectively something which the external body, as cause of the affection, contains formally. For example, suppose I have an idea which represents the sun to me. This idea is not a mental picture of the sun. It is the objective reality of an affection of my body, an affection which is produced by the action of the sun upon the parts of my body. Since the sun is cause of this bodily affection, and since there must be something in common between cause and effect

(*E. I.*, 3), there is something in common between the sun and my bodily affection. My idea represents the sun to me, by virtue of the fact that its object is an affection which has something in common with the sun. Thus the resemblance or likeness is not between my idea and the sun. It is between my bodily affection and the sun; or, since "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things," it is between the idea whose object is my bodily affection and the idea whose object is the sun.

Thus, by separating the relation between an idea and its object from the relation between an idea and the thing it represents, Spinoza suggests an interpretation of the representation relation which does not make it a relation of likeness between two things which are essentially unlike. It seems, however, that the problem of resemblance between two unlike things is merely transferred from the representation relation to the relation between an idea and its object. If it is difficult to see how an idea and a material body can belong to totally distinct realms and yet have something in common, it is even more difficult to see how they can belong to totally distinct realms and yet be one and the same thing. The problem which arises for Spinoza at this point is basically the same as the one which arises from his claim that thought and extension, though totally distinct and independent attributes, yet constitute the essence of one and the same substance (*E. I.*, 10 Schol.).¹⁹ The problem on the level of finite modes derives from the problem on the level of attributes; for the idea and the object are distinguishable only in terms of the attributes under which they are conceived. The problem of how an idea and its object can be one and the same thing jeopardizes, not only Spinoza's account of the nature of representation, but also his attempt to bridge the Cartesian gap between the internal characteristics of ideas and the accuracy of their representation.

¹⁹ The problem with regard to the attributes is raised by Martineau, *op. cit.*, p. 185, as well as by Reginald Jackson in his article, "The Doctrine of Substance in Descartes and Spinoza," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, IV (1926), 208.

IV

How does one know which ideas in the human mind represent things as they really are and which do not? In answer to this question, Spinoza appeals to the principle that whatever is adequately conceived is true. Thus the notion of adequacy plays the same role in Spinoza's system as the notion of clearness and distinctness plays in Descartes's. That is, it enables one to determine which ideas give accurate representations, without directly comparing the ideas with the things they represent. Spinoza, however, attempts to characterize adequacy in such a way that there is a necessary connection between the adequacy of ideas and their truth.

At the beginning of Part I of the *Ethics* Spinoza characterizes a true idea as follows:

A true idea must agree with that of which it is the idea [Ax. 6].

At the beginning of Part II he gives the following definition of an adequate idea:

By adequate idea, I understand an idea which, in so far as it is considered in itself, without reference to the object, has all the properties or internal signs (*denominaciones intrinsecas*) of a true idea.

Explanation: I say internal, so as to exclude that which is external, the agreement, namely, of the idea with its object [Def. 4].

In a letter to Tschirnhaus Spinoza makes explicit the relation between adequacy and truth:

I recognize no other difference between a true and an adequate idea than that the word true refers only to the agreement of the idea with its ideatum, while the word adequate refers to the nature of the idea in itself; so that there is really no difference between a true and an adequate idea except this extrinsic relation.²⁰

From these passages it is apparent that adequacy and inadequacy have to do with certain internal characteristics of the idea, while

²⁰ Wolf, *op. cit.*, Letter LX, 300.

truth and falsity have to do with the relation that the idea has to that of which it is the idea.

The phrase "that of which it is the idea" has acquired an ambiguity in Spinoza's system. It may refer either to the object of the idea or to that which is represented by the idea. To which of these does Spinoza refer when he characterizes the truth as the agreement of the idea with that of which it is the idea? If a true idea were one which agrees with its object, then all ideas would be true; for all ideas are themselves the objective reality of their objects and so "agree" with their objects. Spinoza allows that all of God's ideas are true (*E. II, 32*); but he maintains that some of our ideas are false (*E. II, 35* and Schol.). Close examination of the passages in which he speaks of the falsity of our ideas (for example, the falsity of our idea of the sun's distance from us) reveals that he considers these ideas as false, not with respect to their objects, but with respect to what they represent. The truth or falsity of ideas has to do, not with whether or not the ideas agree with their objects, but with whether or not they represent things as they are in themselves. A true idea of *X* is one which represents *X* as it is in itself. A false idea of *X* is one which represents *X* but not as it is in itself.

An adequate idea is one which, considered in itself, has all the internal signs of a true idea. Since a true idea is one which represents a thing as it really is, an adequate idea is one which, considered in itself, has all the internal signs of an idea which represents a thing as it really is. An idea is adequate or inadequate, not with respect to its object, but with respect to that which it represents.

Thus it is possible to overcome Barker's objection that the existence of inadequate ideas cannot be reconciled with the exact correspondence of ideas and things. Although all ideas agree with their objects, not all ideas agree with the things they represent. Since ideas are adequate or inadequate with respect to that which they represent, the existence of inadequate ideas does not conflict with the exact correspondence of ideas and their objects. An idea may be inadequate with respect to that which it represents and yet agree with its object.

We have an adequate idea of *X* if the idea which represents *X*

to us is the idea which represents X to God—that is, if the idea by which God knows X is in God in so far as he forms the nature of the human mind (*E. II*, 34 Dem.). We have an inadequate idea of X if the idea which represents X to us is not the idea which represents X to God—that is, if the idea by which God knows X is not in God in so far as he forms the nature of the human mind. Our idea of X is inadequate, even though God's idea of X is adequate, since our idea of X is not God's idea of X .

Given this interpretation of adequacy, it is possible to overcome Barker's objection to Spinoza's claim that all of God's ideas are adequate, while some of our ideas are inadequate. Barker believes that this claim implies that there are ideas which are inadequate when related to the human mind and adequate when related to God. He argues that since there cannot be such ideas, Spinoza's claim must be false. This argument rests upon a failure to recognize that ideas are adequate or inadequate in so far as they represent things, and that there is not a one-to-one correspondence between ideas and the things they represent, as there is between ideas and their objects. One and the same idea may represent two different things; and it may be adequate in so far as it represents one, but inadequate in so far as it represents the other. Furthermore, two different ideas may represent one and the same thing, though one idea is adequate and the other is inadequate. While it is true that one and the same idea cannot be adequate when it represents X to God and inadequate when it represents X to the human mind, it does not follow that it cannot be the case that God's idea of X is adequate and our idea of X is inadequate. For the idea which represents X to God and the idea which represents X to the human mind need not be one and the same. When Spinoza claims that all of God's ideas are adequate, while some of our ideas are inadequate, all he means is this. For any X , the idea which represents X to God is adequate; while for some X , the idea which represents X to the human mind is inadequate. From this it does not follow that there is an idea which is adequate in so far as it represents X to God and inadequate in so far as it represents X to the human mind.

How does one determine which of the mind's ideas are adequate

and which are inadequate? Spinoza offers a method of ascertaining the adequacy of ideas which is based upon the kinds of things the ideas represent. Certain things are such that our knowledge of them can only be adequate. If our ideas represent things of this kind, they are adequate.

In *Ethics* II, Proposition 38, Spinoza says that the things of which we can only have adequate knowledge are "those things which are common to everything, and which are equally in the part and in the whole." In the demonstration he explains that things of this kind can only be adequately known by us, because the human mind knows them by means of the ideas by which God knows them. Since God's ideas of them are adequate, and since our ideas of them are the same as God's, our ideas of them are adequate.

Let there be something *A*, which is common to all bodies, and which is equally in the part of each body and in the whole. I say that *A* can only be adequately conceived. For the idea of *A* will necessarily be adequate in God . . . in so far as He has ideas which are in the human mind [*E.* II, 38 Dem.].

When is the idea by which the human mind knows *A* the same as the idea by which God knows *A*? The idea by which God knows *A* is the idea whose object is *A*.

A knowledge of everything which happens in the individual object of any idea exists in God in so far only as He possesses the idea of that object [*E.* II, 9 Cor.].

If the idea by which the human mind knows *A* is the idea whose object is *A*, then the idea by which the human mind knows *A* is the idea by which God knows *A*. Thus Spinoza's method of determining the adequacy of an idea, on the basis of the kind of thing it represents, amounts to this. One determines whether an idea is adequate by considering whether it represents its object or some aspect of its object. If the idea which represents *A* to the human mind is the idea whose object is or includes *A*, then the idea which represents *A* to the human mind is adequate.

Spinoza's demonstration of Proposition 39 may be seen as an

application of this method. Spinoza shows that the human mind has an adequate idea of that which is common to the human body and the external bodies which affect it, and which is equally in the part and in the whole of these bodies, by showing that the idea which represents this property to us is an idea whose object has this property. Let A be a property of the kind just described. Spinoza argues:

Let it be supposed that the human body is affected by an external body through that which it has in common with the external body, that is to say, by A . The idea of this affection will involve the property of A , and therefore the idea of this affection, in so far as it involves the property of A , . . . is . . . adequate in the human mind [*E. II*, 39 Dem.].

Since the external body affects the human body through A , A will be present in the affection of the human body, as it is present in the cause of the affection. Thus the idea whose object is the affection is an idea which includes A in its object. When the idea of the affection represents A to the human mind, it represents something in its object, and thus it is an adequate idea of A .

Since an idea is adequate in so far as it represents its object or something included in its object, there is a necessary connection between the adequacy of an idea and its truth. For if the idea which represents A is the idea whose object is A , then the idea is itself the objective reality of A . The idea and that which it represents are one and the same thing, considered objectively on the one hand and formally on the other. If the idea is the objective reality of the thing it represents, then it represents the thing as it is in itself. And an idea which represents a thing as it is in itself is a true idea of that thing (*E. II*, 43 Schol.).

V

Spinoza claims that the ideas whose objects are the affections of the human body are inadequate when they represent the parts of the human body (*E. II*, 24), external bodies (*E. II*, 25), the human body (*E. II*, 27), the affections of the human body (*E. II*,

28), and the human mind (*E. II*, 29). These ideas are adequate when they represent those things in which all bodies agree (*E. II*, 38 Cor.) and when they represent "the eternal and infinite essence of God" (*E. II*, 45-47).

Our ideas represent external bodies by virtue of the fact that the objects of our ideas have something in common with the external bodies. When our ideas represent to us that which their objects have in common with external bodies, they are adequate ideas. When our ideas represent to us the external bodies themselves, however, they are inadequate; for external bodies are not the objects of our ideas, nor are they wholly included in the objects of our ideas.

Why does Spinoza claim that our ideas are inadequate when they represent the affections of our body, but adequate when they represent "the eternal and infinite essence of God"? The situation seems to be the other way around. If we have an adequate idea of *A* when the idea which represents *A* to us is the idea whose object is *A*, then our ideas, whose objects are the affections of our body, are adequate when they represent those affections. Also, since the idea which represents God's essence to us (*E. II*, 45) is not the idea which represents God's essence to God (*E. II*, 3), our idea of God's essence is not an adequate idea.

Spinoza's claim that we do not have adequate ideas of our bodily affections is based upon a confusion between "adequate" as applied to ideas and "adequate" as applied to causes. We have already observed that Spinoza speaks of ideas as being adequate or inadequate. He also speaks of causes as being adequate or inadequate. At the beginning of Part III of the *Ethics* he defines an adequate cause and an inadequate cause as follows:

I call that an adequate cause whose effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived by means of the cause. I call that an inadequate or partial cause whose effect cannot be understood by means of the cause alone [Def. 1].

A particular thing *X* is the adequate cause of another thing *Y*, just in case *Y* follows from the nature of *X* alone. *X* is the in-

adequate or partial cause of Y , just in case Y follows, not from the nature of X alone, but from the nature of X together with that of another thing W .

The idea representing A is an *adequate idea*, just in case it has the internal characteristics of a true idea—namely, that which it represents is or includes its object. On the other hand, the cause of the idea representing A is an *adequate cause*, just in case the idea follows from the nature of this cause alone, without the concurrent influence of anything else. Spinoza confuses these two notions of adequacy, when he argues as follows. Since the human body is not the adequate cause of its affections, the idea of the human body, or the human mind, is not the adequate cause of the ideas of these affections. Thus the human mind does not have adequate ideas of the affections of the human body (*E. II*, 28 Dem.). The principle underlying this argument is that if the mind has an adequate idea, then the mind is the adequate cause of this idea. In *Ethics III* Spinoza proves that if an idea is adequate in the human mind, then the mind is adequate cause of what follows from the idea (*E. III*, 1 Dem.). But he nowhere proves that if an idea is adequate in the human mind, the mind is adequate cause of the idea itself. On the contrary, from what has been said of the adequacy of ideas and of causes, it seems perfectly possible that the mind may have an adequate idea and yet not be the adequate cause of this idea.

Spinoza's claim that we have an adequate idea of "the eternal and infinite essence of God" is based upon a misapplication of the principle that what is common to everything and equally in the part and in the whole can only be adequately conceived. Spinoza reasons as follows. Since God is the cause of all things, "in so far as He is considered under that attribute of which they are modes," the idea of every existing individual involves "the eternal and infinite essence of God" (*E. II*, 45 Dem.). Since every idea involves God's essence, God's essence can only be adequately conceived.

Whether a thing be considered as a part or as a whole, its idea . . . will involve the eternal and infinite essence of God. Therefore that which gives a knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God is common

to all, and is equally in the part and in the whole. This knowledge therefore (Prop. 38, pt. 2) will be adequate [*E. II*, 46 Dem.].

Since the human mind possesses ideas which involve God's essence, it "possesses an adequate knowledge of the eternal and infinite essence of God" (*E. II*, 47).

The principle introduced in Proposition 38 is that what is common to every individual can only be adequately conceived. Spinoza, however, does not say that God's essence is common to every individual. He says only that the idea of every individual involves God's essence. From what he says in Part I of the *Ethics*, it is apparent that the idea of each individual involves a different aspect of God's essence. For the idea of each individual involves God's essence in so far as God is cause of the individual; and God is cause of individual things "in so far as the attribute is modified by a modification which is finite" (*E. I*, 28 Dem.). Although every individual has God as its cause, the ideas of different individuals involve God's essence in so far as it is modified by different modifications. What is common to every individual is that it has God as cause in so far as he is modified by something finite. God's essence per se is not common to every individual. Thus Spinoza cannot support his claim that we have adequate knowledge of it by appeal to Proposition 38.

If an idea is adequate in so far as it represents its object or something included in its object, then some of the ideas which Spinoza says are inadequate turn out to be adequate, and some of the ideas which he says are adequate turn out to be inadequate. Spinoza attempts to make the class of adequate ideas coincide with Descartes's class of clear and distinct ideas. According to Descartes, our ideas of the affections of our body are not clear and distinct, while our idea of God as a perfect being is clear and distinct. In like manner, Spinoza claims that the former ideas are not adequate, while the latter idea is adequate. Given the way in which Spinoza characterizes the adequacy of ideas, however, the class of adequate ideas does not coincide with Descartes's class of clear and distinct ideas. Spinoza succeeds in dispensing with the Cartesian gap between the internal characteristics of ideas and the accuracy with which they represent things external; but

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the way in which he does so prevents him from drawing the distinction between adequate and inadequate ideas in the same way as Descartes draws the distinction between ideas which are clear and distinct and those which are not.

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