Relationality and Individuality in Spinoza

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Introduction

The notion of individuality is central to Spinoza's philosophy[1]. This centrality can be firstly explained, on a general ontological register, by the idea that actual existence is organised in the form of individuals. Nothing transcends or underlies the multiplicity of individuals. Substance[2], identified as God or Nature, is nothing but the infinite process of production of multiple individuals, whereas individuals, being all causally dependent and thus related, are the necessary existence of substance. In other words, the multiplicity of individuals and the unity of substance are reciprocal. Secondly, the concept of the individual figures as crucial in Spinoza's thought for the essential elements it provides to our understanding of his ethical project. Different interpretations of Spinoza's ethics partly reflect different understandings of his notion of individuality. Those who read Spinoza as promoting an atomic view of individuality, for instance, generally explicate his ethical model in egoistic or individualistic terms. Conversely, interpretive orientations that focus on the expansion of corporeal and mental boundaries conceive his ethics as a relational process in which the formation of more composite individuals does not preclude the expression and development of the individual's striving for self-determination.

This article's main objective is to present distinct interpretations of Spinoza's theory of individuality and to demonstrate how Spinoza's ontology can be partially elucidated if investigated in close association with his epistemology. Since Spinoza conceives the individual as a union of body and mind[3], both the physical and the mental constituent aspects of individuality will be examined here. The Spinozist notion of body is our starting point: in defining the body as a conjunction of parts organised under a characteristic proportion of motion and rest[4] which is dependent on exchanges with other bodies in order to exist[5], Spinoza asserts the constitutive relationality of bodies. The expansiveness of individual boundaries as an idea that derives from the focus on the defining relational aspects of bodies is then explored through Spinoza's comments on the difference between part and whole[6], but also through the notion of the "inorganic body" (Collier, 2002), which is followed by a discussion concerning whether the political state can be regarded as a genuine individual (Matheron, 1988; Barbone, 2001). To the discussion based on more

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[1] The following abbreviated notation will be used when referring to Spinoza's *Ethics*: EI (II, III, IV, V) for *Ethics,* Part I (Roman numerals refer to the Parts of the *Ethics*); A for axiom; C for corollary; D for demonstration (or definition if followed by an Arabic numeral); L for lemma; Post. for postulate; P for proposition; Pref. for preface; S for scholium (Arabic numerals denote the lemma, proposition or scholium number); and, Ap for appendix. Citations from the *Ethics* and from Spinoza's correspondence are quoted from *The Ethics and other works. A Spinoza Reader.* Edited and translated by Edwin Curley; New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994.

[2] Substance for Spinoza is not defined in Aristotelian terms as individuals (in the case of primary substances) or species (secondary substances), or as in Descartes for whom mind and matter are also substances. For Spinoza, substance is "what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed" (EI D3). In this sense, there is only one substance, that is, God or Nature.

[3] "The mind and the body are one and the same individual, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension" (EII P21 S). For Spinoza, since mind and body are modes of a single substance rather than distinct mental and material substances, there can be no causal interaction between them. This idea conveys his thesis of parallelism. The correspondence between mind and body is also asserted by the following passages: "The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else" (EII P13); and "the idea of the mind and the mind itself are one and the same thing" (EII P21 S).

[4] EII P13 A2 L1.

[5] EII P13 Post. 4.

[6] Letter 32.

physicalist interpretations, epistemological considerations are introduced. They will clarify that the extendible character of the human body and mind, although always actual, can constitute distinct experiences of integration: one characterised by imagination or the local awareness of its relations, and the other defined by reason, that is, the understanding of the causal connections that engender it. Following this interpretive strand, I argue, in line with Heidi Ravven (2002) and Etienne Balibar (1997), that Spinoza's theory of individuation is better comprehended if examined in association with his epistemology.

The ethical implications that emerge from this association are also clear. Since Spinoza equates virtue with a transition to greater self-determination or activity, I will demonstrate how the forms of integration engendered by imagination and reason are also differentiated by their corresponding effects on the power with which individuals strive to preserve their existence (this striving being their *conatus*)[7]. While in imaginative systems individuals' power to act is decreased, in rational systems it is enhanced as a result of a more adequate understanding of the connectedness they experience in Nature. This latter understanding facilitates the union between individuals, leading to the formation of a collective or superior individual in which each participating individual has its self-determination enlarged. Since activity is achieved through the transformation of inadequate modes of knowledge into more adequate ones, a virtuous life is one in which the cultivation of reason is essential. Spinoza's ethics can thus be understood as a process in which our powers to act or preserve ourselves are incremented as we unite with others "under the guidance of reason"[8]. As his ethical project entails the expansion of our understanding, I argue that it can be interpreted as a transindividual process of education of the imagination – each individual constituting a moment in this process or a determinate level of integration.

The interpretive position which maintains that relationality and the expansiveness of individual boundaries are essential aspects of Spinoza's ontology is here supported not only for the textual evidence shown to validate it but also for the challenging consequences it poses to our traditional forms of thinking. In conceiving the individual as constitutively relational, the boundaries that distinguish self and other gain flexibility and the focus shifts to the very processes which define individuals. Consequently, ethics is more clearly viewed as a dynamic system of sociability which is conditioned by distinct regimes of knowledge. The transition to more rational systems entailed by ethics can thus be envisaged as a process of education of the imagination. Moreover, since the mind is a series of ideas corresponding to the series of states of its body (see note 4), an adequate examination of Spinoza's epistemology involves his theory of affects. The close association between reason and affectivity as conceived by Spinoza constitutes one of his most invaluable philosophical contributions and is also illuminated by his relational ontology[9].

THE BODY: CHANGING TO CONSERVE

Spinoza asserts that "the mind and the body are one and the same individual, which is conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension"[10]. He also maintains that "the object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body"[11] and that "no one will be able to understand it adequately, or distinctly, unless he first knows adequately the nature of our body"[12]. Thus, in line with Spinoza's prescription and following his own steps in the *Ethics*[13], I depart from his notion of body in order to understand his conception of mind and subsequently his theory of individual.

In accordance with the physics of his epoch and in interlocution with Descartes, Spinoza used a double vocabulary to speak of the body. On one hand, the *Ethics* presents what Deleuze (2002, p. 128) calls a *kinetic proposition*: "Bodies are distinguished from one another by reason of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and not by reason of substance"[14]. This ratio of movement and rest which distinguishes a body from others is maintained by the way through which a great

[7] "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being" (EIII P6).

[8] "Men who, from the guidance of reason, seek their own advantage – want nothing for themselves which they do not desire for other men" (EIV P18 S).

[9] It is not the purpose of this article to investigate the implications of Spinoza's relational ontology for his theory of affects. The reader, however, is invited to draw such connections.

[10] EII P21 S.

[11] EII P13.

[12] EII P13 S.

[13] Where in the second part, entitled "of the nature and origin of the mind", Spinoza offers a detailed account of the notion of body.

[14] EII P13 A2 L1.

number of particles or individuals compose the bodies[15]. These particles or individuals are extrinsic parts which are different from one another, and relate to one another under a characteristic ratio. Thus movement and rest constitute both the way through which a body is extrinsically distinguished and the relations between simple bodies or particles. In addition to the kinetic definition, ideas referring to an *affective dynamics* are also deployed by Spinoza in order to explain what a body is. Since a body is in constant contact with other bodies, affecting and being affected by them, Spinoza considers these affections as a power which will also define bodies.

Between the kinetic and the dynamic propositions there is a clear relation of correspondence. As the human body is composed by a great number of parts, and these extensive parts affect each other by nature, Spinoza concludes that the body will therefore be affected in a great number of ways[16]. In the same manner that extensive parts belong to a body under a certain relation, the affections of a body correspond to its power to be affected. It is through the motion and rest of other composite bodies that a body is affected and determined to motion and rest. The structure of a body is hence the composition of its relation of motion and rest inasmuch as that which a body can do corresponds to the nature and the limits of its power to be affected. For the purposes of this paper my analysis will concentrate on the kinetic or mechanic aspects through which the body is defined.

We can see that in both the kinetic and the dynamic explications the body is neither defined by its organs, functions or ends nor it is defined as a substance. For Spinoza, bodies are finite modes or modifications of the absolute substance or nature. But what does it mean to be a mode? The concept of mode is different from that of substance as it is "that which is in another through which it is also conceived"[17] – thus a mode is understood as existentially and conceptually dependent. By stating that a mode is finite, Spinoza means that it is limited by other modes of its kind (bodies limit bodies, and ideas limit ideas). The finitude of a mode denotes that it has no absolute self-sufficiency, that it can only be comprehended through its relation with substance and other modes. In short, the concept of mode indicates a constitutive opening: bodies (and minds) are not understood as enclosed or self-contained**,** but as constitutively relational.

At a physical level, the fundamental relationality of modes can be demonstrated through the reciprocity between constancy and change. This reciprocity accounts for the conservation of a body and is explained by Spinoza through three basic processes: 1. the exchange of extensive parts, in other words, the continuous removal of some parts of a body while at the same time parts of other bodies are incorporated, maintaining a certain proportion of motion and rest invariant[18]; 2. the change in size of constituent parts provided this does not modify the global relation of motion and rest[19]; 3. the modification of some partial movement which is compensated by another under the affection caused by exterior bodies[20]. Since for Spinoza component parts can be understood as both matter and movement, the exchange of extensive parts does not differ from the exchange of moves. Thus the constant change of extensive parts and the variation of motion and rest between particles do not necessarily imply an alteration of the whole - the same characteristic proportion of motion and rest can continue to exist between the mode's great number of parts. Such processes describe a state in which bodily coherence implies a state of dynamic equilibrium. It is important to note that the conservation of a body is not only compatible with such continuous changes of its constituent parts and their partial motions, but is nothing but this very process. It is in this sense that Spinoza asserts that the preservation of a body is dependent on its regeneration, which is in turn dependent on the interactions with a great many other bodies[21].

Hans Jonas (1973, p. 269) notes that with Spinoza, for the first time in modern thought, the individual is defined not as a machine that functions as a closed system, but as a unified plurality sustained by a sequence of exchanges with the environment, and whose form of union constitutes its only enduring feature: "substantial identity is thus replaced by formal identity". A mode's form is what distinguishes it from other modes, it is a determinate configuration that continues to exist throughout the interactions on which it depends and that is evidenced by its self-affirming effort or *conatus* by which a mode tends to persevere

[15] EII P13 Post 1.
[16] EII P13 Post 3.
[17] EI def D5.
[18] EII L4.
[19] EII L5.
[20] EII L7.
[21] EII P13 Post.4.

in existence. Form, continuity, and relation are, according to Jonas[22], the three characteristics that define a mode in Spinoza.

THE EXTENDIBLE INDIVIDUAL

The aspects that have just been presented as the defining characteristics of a single existent mode (namely, its form, continuity and relation) can also be identified as constitutive of Nature as a whole. The totality of the universe can be considered a single individual which is defined by the total ratio of motion and rest derived from the sum of all relations. This conception of different levels of individuation is more explicitly put forward by Spinoza in one of his letters to Oldenburg[23], where he demonstrates how the different particles of the blood (lymph, chyle, and the like), each with its distinctive relation, will relate so as to form the blood under a third relation. The blood, in turn, is also a composite part of the human body under another dominant relation. Spinoza makes clear that there are objective levels or orders of magnitude in Nature which are defined by their interactions or reciprocal actions. The distinction between whole and part is thus relative: something which is a part at one level can be a whole at another level, and conversely. What defines the whole and the part, however, is certainly not arbitrary or merely apparent. Its reality is based on the characteristic proportion of motion and rest of individuals.

If on the level of Nature as a whole, all relations can be combined, on other levels, however, not every interaction will enhance the individual's preservation. Some might in fact modify its defining ratio of motion and rest in ways that lead to its annihilation[24]. Deleuze (1968, 2002) suggests that the processes involving the conservation or destruction of a finite mode should be described in terms of composition and decomposition of its characteristic relations. Two cases account for these processes: If two composite bodies meet and the relations which define each of them agree, a composition of such relations will occur or, in other words, the extensive parts of one will adjust to the parts of the other, thus generating a third relation which is formed by the composition of the preceding relations. In this case, a body-composite of the original bodies will be engendered, enhancing their preservation[25]. However, it could also be the case that the constitutive relations of two bodies that meet do not compose or combine with one another. Such bodies would then be either indifferent to each other or one would decompose the other's characteristic relation. Thus, using Spinoza's example of the blood composite, if we consider the intrusion of poison whose relations will not agree with those of the blood, we will see that the decomposition or destruction of the blood's constitutive relation is bound to occur. The destruction of the human body of which the blood is a part is the likely outcome of this alteration of the characteristic relation of the body[26].

Andrew Collier (2002) analyses the processes of composition or enlargement of constitutive relations not only from a corporal perspective. He argues that "we must consider the body as extendible, in the sense that the more the body in the narrow sense interacts with the world about it, the more that world is to be counted as part of the person's *inorganic body*"[27]. This expansiveness attributed to bodies would thus solve the problem that emerges from Spinoza's definition of the mind as an idea of the body[28]. Considering that for Spinoza "the idea of any mode 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"[29], the body to which an idea corresponds would thus encompass the external objects with which it relates as its own parts. Collier asserts that every day experiences attest to the expansiveness of our notion of body beyond the limits of our body-actual: to a certain degree, prosthetics, clothes, vehicles and tools are treated as part of us. Some of these objects largely increase our power to affect and be affected. In this sense, the configuration of the inorganic body depends on how essential its experienced interactions are. The alterability of these exchanges and subsequent constitution of the inorganic body are defined by one's efforts to persist in existence. Since existence is only made possible through multiple relations, Collier argues

[22] *Ibid.,* p. 265.
[23] Letter 32.
[24] EIV P39 D.
[25] EIV P18 S.
[26] "Things which bring it about that the human body's parts acquire a different proportion of motion and rest to one another bring it about that the human body takes on another form, that is […], that the human body is destroyed, and hence rendered completely incapable of being affected in many ways" (EIV P39 D).
[27] *Ibid.,* p. 292.
[28] EII P13.
[29] EII P16.

that "the body which the *conatus* is striving to preserve is not the body-actual, but something indefinitely larger, and the more that that *conatus* succeeds, the larger the body that it pertains to"[30].

Also allowing extensive enlargements as part of the notion of individual, Alexandre Matheron (1969, p. 37-61) defines the individual in Spinoza by its constituent material and formal elements. The material element refers to the organization of the particles that form a body under its invariable proportion of motion and rest. The formal element differentiates between a simple aggregate of things and a defined formal structure. It is a unifying formula which regulates the pattern of movement and rest among the individual parts. Moreover, it is the source of the individual's operations and that by which the individual strives to sustain in existence: its *conatus*. Matheron states that an individual in Spinoza is, therefore, nothing other than the totality of its parts (its material element) expressed through a determinate unifying formula (its formal element). According to Matheron[31], such a definition allows us to consider many different things as individuals: "the solar system, the planet earth, a cyclone, a stone, a biological organism, etc. It equally applies to the total of the Universe. […] It is also applicable, among other things, to political societies".

Expansion constrained: the atomic individual and the state

While the focus on the relational constitution of individuals has allowed some scholars to argue for a version of individuality that admits various levels of integration, other examiners of Spinoza's texts have argued that there is much evidence to disprove the notion of an extendible individual. Robert McShea (1969), Lee Rice (1990) and Steven Barbone (2001), for instance, argue, in direct opposition to Matheron, that the kind of unity that a political society or state embodies does not constitute a genuine individual in Spinoza's terms. Barbone[32] asserts that "the *conatus* is a force found 'inside' each individual" and an individual cannot be understood as such if its unifying force is explained by external elements that form it. In this sense, a pile of stones cannot be considered an individual given that there is nothing internal to it that functions as a formal element, no unifying force or *conatus* by which it strives to preserve its existence and operations as a defined conjunction. Barbone also suggests that we imagine a school of fish: each individual fish would congregate with other fish not because of the 'individual' group, but because by joining the school each individual fish maximises its chances of survival. There is no general *conatus* or global effort being exerted to preserve the school's operations or existence as a collective.

Furthermore, Barbone utilises Spinoza's statement from EII D7 to clarify the distinction between an individual constituted by a number of things and a singular thing composed by many individuals: "if a number of individuals so concur in one action that together they are all the cause of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing". The school of fish would thus be considered a thing and not an individual.

Given that an individual for Spinoza is conceived as both a mind and a body[33], the philosopher's references in his political writings and the *Ethics* to a collective mind could lead to the conclusion that states ought to be considered authentic individuals. Barbone[34] notes, however, that Spinoza's statements are counterfactual and hence do not indicate the reality of a social mind. In the *Ethics*, for example, Spinoza asserts that "man […] can wish for nothing more helpful to the preservation of his being than that all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were [*quasi*], one mind and one body"[35]. Barbone concludes that, at the most, social entities can be considered metaphorical or *quasi* individuals, but not actual individuals. Additionally, he argues that the distinction between individuals and *quasi* individuals is crucial as it informs the type of relationship individuals establish with the state. He suggests that in Spinoza's "individualistic and egoistic" philosophy political institutions are not more important than the individuals joined in them: "the state exists for the benefit of each individual who finds him or herself in it, and it cannot be the case that an individual exists for the benefit of the state"[36].

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 298.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 42.
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 100.
[33] EII P21 S.
[34] *Ibid.,* p. 105.
[35] EIV P18 S.
[36] *Ibid.*, p. 106.

ADEQUATE AND INADEQUATE EXPANSION

Heidi Ravven (2002) acknowledges the contradictions found in the *Ethics* in regard to the extendible character of the body and mind and argues that such an aspect of Spinoza's ontology is more clearly stated and unambiguously maintained by Spinoza in his *Short Treatise*, which was written before the introduction of the *conatus* doctrine in the *Ethics*. In her article *"Spinoza's individualism reconsidered"*, Ravven claims that the body politic and other social entities are neither strictly metaphorical (and in that way they do not supposedly disguise Spinoza's true atomic individualism), nor are they natural individuals (which constitute the way things really are in the order of nature and explanation). Instead, social entities "convey the real (yet limited) character of the local extension of the body and mind as encompassing their immediate environment"[37]. This limited extension is true, it is factually existent and thus not metaphorical, but it is not ultimately adequate either materially or intellectually for it neither makes manifest nor apprehends its underlying causal system and explanation.

Ravven asserts that by focusing on Spinoza's physics to explicate the notion of individual, Collier and Matheron undermine the fundamental contrast between an adequate version of expansion and an inadequate one. The expansion that involves only the direct environment, as conceived by these authors, characterises the inadequate version. In opposition to Barbone's claim about the implausibility of defining the state as an individual, she also notes that in the *Short Treatise* the mind and body politic could be considered to have the same status that Spinoza grants to the expansion of the body-mind in and through its immediate interactions: the expansion is thus real but inadequate, both in scope and in form.

What would then distinguish an adequate type of expansion from an inadequate one? Before we respond to this question, it is important to recall that for Spinoza the mind is the idea of which the body is the object.[38] The mind is hence ongoing thinking, which is reflective and expressive of its own body. Its activity (or the activity that it indeed is) corresponds to the bodily alterations as the body encounters other bodies which affect it and change it. The mind is not a substance, a self that thinks or a container for thoughts. The human individual, defined as body and mind, is therefore its extensive constitution, expressed as a certain ratio of motion and rest maintained through constant interactions with other bodies, and its awareness of each moment in that interactive process.

Since the body, of which the mind is an idea, is continuously affecting and being affected by other bodies, the mind is the idea not only of the body to which it corresponds, but also of the ongoing relation between the body and its immediate environment. And considering that the mind is not a substance or a container but the very activity of thinking, as that relation is made present in its thinking it actually is that relation. The mind, therefore, is not an isolated unit set against an external world which it apprehends, but is the process of encompassing the relation between body and world in thought.

Ravven[39] notes that the thinking or knowledge which corresponds to the various alterations of corporal boundaries that result from the body's interactions with its immediate environment is inadequate because the reality that mere awareness involves is local, partial, and non-causal. In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza maintains that true or adequate understanding entails a transition from the knowledge of the immediacy of bodily alterations to the knowledge of the extensional and mental causal order. This second type of knowledge consists primarily in the understanding of the causes that, in Spinoza's view, serve as a genetic explanation for things (among them, the mind and the body). The association between cause and genetic explanation is made explicit in Spinoza's rule of definition:

> The rule is this: that belongs to the nature of a thing [the causes] without which the thing can neither exist nor be understood [and this, we have been told, is God]: but this is not sufficient; it must be in such a way that the proposition is always convertible, viz. that what is said also can neither be nor be understood without the thing[40].

In other words, the causes that engender a thing define it, that is, belong to its nature materially and conceptually. The boundaries between a thing, its material causes and intellectual explanations are thus dissolved. In understanding the causes of its mind and

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 263

[38] EII P13

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] KV II Preface [5] of the *Short Treatise*, cited in Ravven (2002, p. 252).

body, an individual incorporates them, mentally becoming these causes, which will then operate immanently as the thinking activity that the mind is. Deleuze (1968, p. 143) points out that Spinoza's notion of knowledge as genetic explanation finds in Aristotle its source: "Spinoza does not merely mean that the effects known depend on causes. He means in Aristotelian manner that knowledge of a thing itself depends on the knowledge of its cause". In this sense, an understanding is adequate insofar as, from those clearly conceived properties of a thing, we formulate a genetic definition from which follow all of its known properties. A thing's definition would thus express its efficient cause or the genesis of what it defines; that is to say that when the thing's idea expresses its own cause an adequate idea is formed.

Instead of reproducing in idea the body's experiences of its own reactions to the immediate surroundings, the human individual can think of the causal extensional order so as to understand the genesis of its own particular body as a mode of extension. In assimilating this general causal order, the individual's mind becomes identical to the substantial order of thought. As Ravven points out, it is not that one's thinking of reality is then transformed but it is the very reality of one's mind that changes. Furthermore, in an immanent system, the more adequately a mind thinks, the more substantial or integrated to the whole of nature it becomes, and not only the more of nature's order it mirrors or represents. In absorbing the determining ideas, the distinctions between what is internal and what is external to the individual are shown to be inadequate. However, it is important to note that as boundaries are reshaped in virtue of the mind's assimilation of the general order of causality, the original limited individual is reconfigured but its individuality is not extinguished – it is, indeed, enhanced. In this sense, Rorty (2001, p. 289-290) asserts that "as ideas become increasingly adequate, individuation is correspondingly diminished (EIV P35). To the extent that two individuals have increasingly adequate ideas, they are decreasingly differentiated". Nonetheless, "in diminishing their individuation, individuals do not diminish their individuality". Indeed, individuality – understood as the power of an individual to preserve and determine itself – augments in direct proportion to the decrease of individuation, as the inadequate ideas that individuate are absorbed into the co-determinative system of adequate ideas.

The direct association between the expansion of individual boundaries that derives from adequate ideas, on one hand, and the augmentation of the individual's capacity to preserve its existence, on the other, will be further explored in the following section. The concepts of imagination and reason will be deployed for this purpose.

REASON AS A TRANSINDIVIDUAL SYSTEM OF INTEGRATION

As we have seen, Ravven demonstrates how the constituent relationality of human individuals in Spinoza allows us to conceive their expansiveness or non-atomic configuration in both cases: 1. when there is only an immediate awareness of local interactions and 2. when the mind assimilates its causes or the genesis of its ideas and bodily modifications. In the first case, imagination is at work. As our bodies retain traces of the changes brought about by other bodies, the mind regards the other bodies as present even when they no longer exist[41]. Imagination consists in the mind regarding bodies in this way. Its inadequacy resides in the confused perception that an individual has of other bodies and its own since it is aware of their effects on its body but not of the causes; it functions as if it reached conclusions without premises[42]. In social terms, imagination is fostered by processes of affective imitation and successive identifications (where one recognises the other from oneself and oneself from the other) through which culturally established ideas are transmitted. Imagination is thus not only the result of personal and idiosyncratic experiences, but also of socio-cultural contents, inherited conceptions and collective fictions. In the second case, the individual's boundaries are transformed as a result of reason. The understanding by an individual's mind of non-immediate causal connections (that, as shown, serve as an explanation of its own genesis) constitutes an adequate kind of knowledge or reason. Reason is governed by *common notions* which are universally applied to any object and also common to all human minds since they are ideas of properties which can be found equally in the whole and in the parts[43]. When the mind knows according to reason, it is "determined internally, from the fact that it regards a number of things at once, to

[41] EII P17 D, C.
[42] EII P28 D.
[43] EII P40 S.

understand their agreements, differences, and oppositions"[44].

Etienne Balibar (1997, p. 30-31) suggests that both imagination and reason are not conceived in Spinoza as faculties of the mind, but as transindividual systems in which different minds are mutually implicated. Imagination and reason as such are processes and the individuals involved correspond to moments in these processes, indicating determinate levels of integration. In imaginative systems, individuals are dominated by inadequate or confused ideas which oscillate between contrasting illusions: individuals regard each other as either identical or incompatible. In rational systems, individuals identify each other as different but also acknowledge that they share much in common; they are irreducible to one another, each having what Spinoza calls a specific *ingenium*, while being reciprocally useful or *convenientes*. In both cases, there is relationality or transindividuality, but one form being opposed to the other. This is why Balibar argues that each kind of knowledge can thus be considered as a specific way to establish a connection between the individual's preservation and the institution of a community.

In stating that there is nothing more useful to humans than other humans[45], Spinoza recommends the reciprocal use of each other's forces. The building of a community where there is common understanding of nature's determination, a community in which the minds and bodies of all compose, "as it were", one single body and one single mind, is seen to enhance self-conservation[46]. Thus, reason as a transindividual system engenders forms of integration based on mutual convenience, in which each individual's striving to preserve itself is empowered by others', building up a collective or superior individual without suppressing their self-determination[47]. On the contrary, the shared use of reason can only enlarge each individual's capacity to think or know, and accordingly their power to persevere in existence.

The interdependence between the capacity to preserve ourselves, our predominant mode of knowledge and the type of community in which we partake indicates how ontology, epistemology, politics and ethics are closely related in Spinoza's philosophy. Nevertheless, the expansion of our powers to act, and subsequently the exercise of reason and harmonious forms of sociability, is not to be viewed as necessarily progressive. Since, according to Spinoza, inadequate ideas will never cease to constitute human experience, ethics is better understood not as a linear process towards more rational individuals and societies. The inextricable relation between knowledge and affectivity largely accounts for the complexities of the ethical process – a never ending process of education of our imagination and desire.

[44] EII P29 S.

[45] EIV P18 S.

[46] EIV P18 S.

[47] Various passages of the *Ethics* convey the idea that relationships based on individuals' common nature form a superior individual without diminishing their capacity to preserve their existence: EIV P38-39; EIV P2-7; EIV P29-31; EIVP38-40.

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