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MEHMET FATİH ELMAS
ORCID: 0000-0002-9728-2635
Bursa Uludağ University, Bursa, Türkiye
Email: mfelmas@uludag.edu.tr

Against *Entia Imaginationis*, with *Imagination*: Toward a New Conception of Religion in Spinoza

Keywords: nature, imagination, intellect, contingency, necessity
Słowa kluczowe: natura, wyobraźnia, intelekt, przygodność, konieczność

Abstract

From ancient times to the present day, philosophy, which makes a distinction between objects of knowledge and belief, has distinguished itself as a field of activity concerned not with things that are subject to time and space, but with those that cannot be otherwise under the form of eternity, or those that truly are. When it comes to the conversion of the ontological and epistemological horizon into the ethical realm, concepts such as goodness, the human good, and justice—even though they are framed according to time and space—are considered to be concepts that can be actualized as desires arising in the mind or *intuited* under the form of eternity. This points to two interdependent scenarios: recognizing an event or phenomenon within the context of time and space and comprehending it within the context of eternity. Two distinct cognitive faculties are at work in these two scenarios. For Spinoza, one of these is imagination; the other is reason. This article examines the function of imagination in Spinoza. Spinoza concludes that concepts such as 'Being', 'God', and 'religion', which are constructed on the basis of ideas acquired from random experiences in a fragmented or inadequate manner, must be removed from the mind. In contrast, by connecting the aspect of imagination that enables common

life to reason, we arrive at a conception of God that arises entirely from reason, in which humans can know themselves adequately under the guidance of reason, and at a related conception of 'religion'.

Introduction

In the 15th and 16th centuries, with the increasing use of rationality, experimentation, observation, and logical innovations in science, philosophical interventions aimed at stripping nature of its sacredness soon began to change the horizon of the conception of nature. With the philosophical revolutions that followed the scientific revolution, philosophy broke away from its recent past. As teleological physics was invalidated by mechanical physics, the relationships between God, nature, and humans were reconfigured. The idea of infinity, as a perfection comprehensible to the faculty of understanding, also enabled a godless cosmos. Philosophers who believed in the ideal of autonomy—that there is no authority to appeal to other than reason itself—and believed that they could understand themselves and nature by utilizing their own mental potential became convinced that they could solve all problems by relying on their own intellectual powers.

The 17th century was the age of thinkers who were avid followers of developments in mathematics and physics, who sought to decipher the natural world according to a mechanical model, who believed that truth could be found solely through the power of reason, and who, in this vein, addressed the metaphysical construction of physical reality. When it comes to the moral sphere, a philosophical discourse is expected to be in harmony with the sciences. Indeed, the philosopher feels obliged to develop a moral discourse that does not ignore the physical world and that takes into account what science says about this world. Therefore, the philosopher's task is to construct a realistic, autonomous, freedom-based system that is also systematic. This system must be constructed according to a model appropriate to human nature, taking into account the results of research on nature, rather than referring to supernatural forces that intervene in nature from outside.

Changing worldviews and the resulting social conditions have fostered a critical approach to religious beliefs. Questioning the understanding that this world has a final purpose, which can only be found in the afterlife, modern thinkers, taking into account the latest advances in science,

have worked on formulations based on more reasonable principles that do not neglect this world. As is well known, rules of ethics previously established for human action were presented for centuries as God's command/decree/law, helping to protect people from many disasters. However, in the 17th century, and especially from the 18th century onwards, under the great influence of critical rationalist philosophies, teachings began to proliferate according to which ethical rules were not revelation-based but reason-based, that is, that they originated from human reason itself. Modern humans have pursued what is consistent with reason. For a modern person, the fact that any law is divinely inspired does not strengthen that law or command; rather, it weakens it and makes it suspicious. Therefore, this 'belief' that the principles that determine what is practical originate from human reason has shown that religion is not the sole source of morality. The issues formulated on this subject generally revolve around the following question: Can a system of moral principles be established based solely on human reason, without reference to religion or sacred books based on revelation? During this period, attempts were made to liberate the source of ethics from religion and reestablish it on a scientific basis. In the modern era, humans are now the founding subjects of the realm of values that govern their sphere of action. Accordingly, a person's morality is not measured by their being a theist; an atheist can also live as an honest, honorable, virtuous citizen.

Every inquiry into human beings and their sphere of action ultimately takes place on the basis of an understanding of existence. One of the philosophers of the modern age who reflected on the possibility of people living together happily was Spinoza, and like every thinker, he too had an understanding of Being and what exists. As is well known, every kind of teaching, whether religious, scientific, or philosophical, is based on a particular anthropology. Spinoza analyzes human nature in natural terms. Spinoza's aim is essentially to establish an ideal of humanity, an understanding of humanity that can serve as a model of human nature and determine the direction of thought. What he aims to achieve with the human ideal he seeks to create by focusing on human nature is, in essence, first to expose the structure of the system that prevents people from realizing their inherent potential for action or life in their spheres of activity, and then to reestablish the system he has exposed. In the newly established order, people are offered a life in which they can live joyfully, freely, virtuously, and happily, based on the ideal established through this idea.

So how is this free, virtuous, and happy life modeled? Spinoza first presents faith and reason as concepts belonging to two distinct spheres. According to him, while reason seeks a truth that constitutes reality in thought, faith offers the individual a prescription for salvation in the realm of action. However, because religious figures ascribe different characteristics to faith, people are unable to find the opportunity to live in an order in which they can actualize their potential. In Spinoza, the distinctive aspect of reason is its ability to recognize, encompass, and know faith. Spinoza believes that if faith is stripped of these burdens, religion can have a positive effect on people in the practical sphere. In Spinoza, religious beliefs and explanations—even if superstitions cannot be entirely eliminated—are transformed by imagination and thus can be useful in establishing a common life with many irrational elements. In this regard, the imagination—which initially appears as the source of error—can make significant contributions to the development of reason. This article demonstrates that Spinoza, by pushing aside a conception of God based on imaginative ideas and the related understanding of religion, established a new understanding of God and religion through ideas based on the power of reason or guided by reason. In this context, the "new religion" to which Spinoza refers corresponds to all our desires and actions stemming from knowledge of God acquired through the systematic understanding of causes, whereas the religious person is one who lives solely under the guidance of reason and possesses the desire to actualize the good that arises within them in this manner.

Imagination as the source of error

Decoding the system that condemns people to a life contrary to their nature, depriving them of the possibility of living together happily, forces Spinoza to think within the theological-political sphere. According to him, the indecisiveness of people who constantly waver between hope and fear causes them to fall prey to superstitions born out of fear. People living under superstition rely most heavily on their imagination to guide their lives. Human communities, determined to exist and act within the grip of hope and fear, are most exploited by those in power. Depending on the situation, those in power sometimes fuel hope and sometimes fuel fear to keep people under control, impeding their capacity for action. They maintain their power by

making crowds who live according to ideas based on imagination desire their slavery as if it were freedom. In this respect, slavery is a state of passivity that arises with the contribution of the slaves themselves (Spinoza, 2002b, p. 750). The concept of power emerges as something desired by people as a result of the synthetic union of imagination and desire. This power calls on everyone to unite in solidarity around a power that rules over everything, yet in which no one can essentially find themselves. However, this solidarity is an invitation to a wholly passive act, inviting people to rally around the power that subjects them. Yet Spinoza's aspiration is an ethical community composed of people guided by reason—where passive allegiance is transformed into active solidarity. To actualize this longing, Spinoza begins with the elimination of superstitions and ideas from the mind that give rise to false perceptions. His operation is directed toward perceptions born of imagination, opinion, and inspiration.

Imagination creates general ideas about individual things. According to Spinoza, when people make judgments about things or situations, there are certain 'universal ideas' implicit in their judgments that guide their thinking. Based on these assumptions, they characterize things or situations as perfect or imperfect. As a natural tendency, they tend to understand everything that exists in nature by reducing it to a single genus, understood as the most comprehensive concept. What is "good" and "bad" is determined in light of these understandings. Accordingly, things that bring something into being as the most comprehensive concept are good, whereas everything that distances it from that concept is bad. However, according to Spinoza, good and evil do not, in fact, signify any quality in themselves. Nevertheless, people compare some things with others, believing that some have a greater share of the highest kind and others a lesser share, and that their perfection is proportional to their share of Being. In this belief, the measure of perfection (corresponding to the 'universal ideas' that guide people's thinking) is its correspondence to reality. However, according to Spinoza, these are mere universals, and universals are *nothing*. An idea must correspond to the object of which it is the idea, not to a universal idea. For example, the neighbor's cat is blue; it must necessarily correspond to the idea of blue, its own particular idea, not to universal ideas. This is because God is only the cause and creator of particular things (Spinoza, 2002c, p. 59). However, universal ideas are not like common notions that exist both in the part and in the whole and about which objective knowledge can be attained.

Rather, they are inadequate ideas consisting of singular things connected by certain similarities, coexistence, and similar associations within the horizons of time and space. In this respect, they are ideas that are far from explaining the nature of individual things (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 320). When taken on its own, a universal idea is only an idea, but when it presents certain ideals to the realm of existence insofar as it is an idea, its regulatory and constitutive aspect emerges. In the context of ideals, people have thought that nature operates according to a final cause. People who believe that God manages or determines everything according to a purpose have, in this respect, begun to believe that everything was created for them, and that they themselves were created to serve God. So much so that concepts found in the human mind, such as good and evil, virtue and sin, and beautiful and ugly, are all products of this belief (Spinoza, 2022a, p. 239). This idea of purposiveness is derived from the illusion of freedom that humans believe they possess. Teleology attributed to nature is essentially a result of the mental state of humans in their natural state. To Spinoza, this way of thinking seems quite reasonable in the natural state. This is because, ultimately, humans are not born with the knowledge of causes. People who come into the world unaware of the order of existence and of causes initially and naturally turn to things that are useful to them in order to sustain their existence; at this stage, it is their appetite that causes them to turn to the only real thing for them. Indeed, the first thing they become aware of is their choices and appetites. Therefore, they believe themselves to be free because they do not know the reasons that guide their actions. By looking at the final causes, they search for the reason behind everything in an external source, and when they cannot find anything, they turn inward. They then begin to think that nature, just like themselves, freely offers everything for their benefit. This principle of usefulness and free will leads them to consider nature on two levels: as ends and as means. Thus, people fall under the illusion that everything is a means to an end. Finally, they seek an external source that creates and shapes everything they see as a means, and from this, they imagine a governing force that they believe provides them with everything. Since they have no knowledge of the nature of this entity, they inevitably look to their own character and assign it a value:

> So it came about that every individual devised different methods of worshipping God as he thought fit in order that God should love him beyond others and direct the whole of Nature so as to serve his blind cupidity and

> insatible greed. Thus it was that this misconception developed into superstition and became deep-rooted in the minds of men, and it was for this reason that every man strove most earnestly to understand and to explain the final causes of all things. But in seeking to show that Nature does nothing in vain—that is, nothing that is not to man's advantage—they seem to have shown only this, that Nature and the gods are as crazy as mankind (Spinoza, 2002a, pp. 239–240).

What actually necessitates all research on teleology is a prejudice deeply embedded in the human mind. The reason it is embedded deeply within the human mind is related to the way misconceptions force themselves upon people. Even later learning what actually exists may not be enough to overturn previous judgments; it is quite difficult to get rid of a prejudice that has become a superstition. In this context, Spinoza gives the example of the sun:

> (…) when we gaze at the sun, we see it as some two hundred feet distant from us. The error does not consist in simply seeing the sun in this way but in the fact that while we do so we are not aware of the true distance and the cause of our seeing it so. For although we may later become aware that the sun is more than six hundred times the diameter of the earth distant from us, we shall nevertheless continue to see it as close at hand. For it is not our ignorance of it true distance that causes us to see the sun to be so near; it is that the affection of our body involves the essence of the sun only to the extent that the body is affected by it (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 264).

How is it possible to free oneself from misconceptions? It seems that the source of misconceptions lies, first, in a lack of knowledge about what something is and, second, in a lack of knowledge about the thing to which we are related. However, people generally prefer to praise or criticize something by attributing value to it rather than explaining its essence or nature. According to Spinoza, it was only with the discovery of mathematics that people found the opportunity to free themselves from this generally prejudiced way of thinking. Mathematics has taught us that we must be concerned with first causes, with essences, not with final causes. Those who read nature solely through the principle of utility can only understand its true order through mathematics, by reading it as a geometric model. After all, the philosopher's task is not to praise or condemn his subject, but only to understand it. Thus, the opportunity arises to learn *how things are in their own internal totality*, rather than what they are useful for in nature. In this respect, the geometric model or attitude has the power to free people from

teleology, voluntarism, and the illusion of freedom. The geometric attitude is essentially the demystification of nature. The elimination of illusions results in the discovery of meaning. Meaning essentially emerges with the exposure of anthropomorphic and teleological design. Therefore, for Spinoza, the idea of freedom is an illusion. Teleology stems from ignorance of causes, and, finally, *will* is clearly a fictitious term whose meaning is unknown. These three terms (teleology, voluntarism, and freedom), which are the pillars of the three great understandings upon which the classical system is built, give rise to an anthropomorphic conception of God and the universe (Bumin, 2012, p. 74).

Therefore, nature does not have a purpose like humans do. This general prejudice, to emphasize this again, is an illusion imposed on humans by the imagination. According to Spinoza, what humans call a teleological cause is actually an efficient cause, which is nothing other than their own desires. However, people are unaware of their desires and therefore live oblivious to the causes that guide them. Imagination shows people the crooked as straight and the straight as crooked. Therefore, the final causes appear to be the first causes:

> And since those who do not understand the nature of things, but only imagine things, make no affirmative judgments about things themselves and mistake their imagination for intellect, they are firmly convinced that there is order in things, ignorant as they are of things and of their own nature. For when things are in such arrangement that, being presented to us through our senses, we can readily picture them and thus readily remember them, we say that they are well arranged; if the contrary, we say that they are ill arranged, or confused. And since those things we can readily picture we find pleasing compared with other things, men prefer order to confusion, as though order were something in Nature other than what is relative to our imagination. And they say that God has created all things in an orderly way, without realizing that they are thus attributing human imagination to God—unless perchance they mean that God, out of consideration for the human imagination, arranged all things in the way that men could most easily imagine. And perhaps they will find no obstacle in the fact that there are any number of things that far surpass our imagination, and a considerable number that confuse the imagination because of its weakness (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 242).

In this case, the problem arises from people confusing real entities with the forms in which they imagine them to be. Spinoza points to two cognitive faculties that guide humans—imagination and reason—and identifies the cause of disagreement among philosophers as their tendency to explain real entities solely through their conceptions (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 266). An explanation must satisfy both of these faculties: "We see therefore that all the notions whereby the common people are wont to explain Nature are merely modes of imagining, and denote not the nature of anything but only the constitution of the imagination. And because these notions have names as if they were the names of entities existing independently of the imagination I call them 'entities of imagination' [*entia imaginationis*] rather than 'entities of reason' [*entia rationis*]" (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 243). Ideas based on imagination conceive of God *sub specie durationis*, under the aspect of time/flow. This imagined being is entirely anthropomorphic; it is shaped in the image of finite passions and modes of humans. However, by its nature, the mind contemplates things as real, necessary, and under the form of eternity, *sub quadam aeternitatis specie.*

Thus, there are two different ways of comprehending things: either under the conditions of time and space or under a form of eternity. Spinoza distinguishes the levels that enable these forms of understanding. In the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (*Treatise on the Improvement of the Understanding*), he speaks of four types of knowledge (Spinoza, 2002d, pp. 8–9), but in the *Ethics* he combines the first two of these four types into the first order, defining them as inadequate knowledge that we encounter in the realm of sensibility and imagination (Spinoza, 2002a, pp. 267–268). Accordingly, the first type of knowledge (*cognitio primi generis*) consists of vague, random experiences; opinions (*opinio*) acquired through our senses from blurry and fragmented individual things; or knowledge based on imagination (*imaginatio*). This level of knowledge is, in essence, everyday knowledge in which we are submerged in passivity and captivity/bondage under the influence and/or determinism of sensuality and imagination. Since everyday knowledge consists of ideas formed in the light of nature's general order, it is not necessarily adequate. Here, we find the influences of the imagination and the passions that arise as a result of these influences. Therefore, the fundamental cause of error is inadequate ideas. These are actually images rather than ideas. Although they show the existence of the external object

and its effect on the body as 'images', they are actually only representations because they do not express/reveal the essence. They are linked to each other by memory as images or signs. However, their existence is necessary for the formation of knowledge. In fact, inadequate ideas are a necessity. In other words, right and wrong exist with the same necessity. The difference is that the wrong is the expression of an idea attached to the human mind, while the right is the expression of an idea attached to God.

According to Spinoza, humans are exposed to inadequate ideas in proportion to their infinite number of external extended parts. However, exposure to the first type of knowledge does not mean that we will remain stuck in this murky world. So, how is it possible for the human mind, which is by its very nature exposed to inadequate ideas, to reach adequate ideas?

The way out of this inadequate world is the second type of knowledge. This type of knowledge is the knowledge of the combination and separation of correlations. Whereas the first type deals with the knowledge of encounters, that is, the interaction of external parts with each other, the second type deals with the knowledge of how an individual's characteristic connections combine with and are disrupted by those of others. Therefore, the second type of knowledge is adequate because it is an action directed toward the knowledge of causes. At this stage, Spinoza puts his theory of 'common notions' to work. Simply put, a common notion is the idea of the combination of relationships between multiple things. The second type of knowledge (*ratio*) is rational knowledge, which allows us to reach common notions and adequate ideas about the properties of things through reasoning: "These (common) notions are our first adequate ideas; they draw us out of the world of inadequate signs" (Deleuze, 2005, p. 291). This level, at which reasoning and inference are essential, is our *rational* side that establishes relations and makes calculations; it leads us to the knowledge of causes. At this level, there is the possibility of thinking thoroughly about scientific or other causes and effects, including the connections of everyday life. In this respect, this level is the way out of slavery. Thus, it elevates human beings to universality. In other words, it reflects our subjectivity toward situations to which we are exposed as a natural consequence of living within relationships full of passivity, expressing a perspective that is captive to the necessity of finitude. Imagination is transformed into intellectual power, enabling ideas to be adequately interrelated. Therefore, the individual can experience the joy that arises from their own essence (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 366).

However, this is only one step toward reaching the truth. But in Spinoza, the true or highest level is the knowledge of essences, not connections, and is represented by the third type. As can be understood, the knowledge of essences is a step beyond the knowledge of connections.

The fact that things have the same order and connection as ideas, and therefore the mind appears as the idea of the body, directs the intellect more toward the formation of common notions and self-knowledge. The act of knowing is an activity aimed at bringing together, in an appropriate way, ideas that are inadequate with respect to the states of the body. In this respect, the third and highest level of knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*) is intuitive knowledge that, after acquiring an adequate idea of the general order of nature, points to the fact that this general order actually operates in the essence of things (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 266). The faculty that enables us to possess common notions and adequate ideas at the second level is reason (*ratio*). At the third level, *intellectus* takes the place of *ratio*. This is because reason does not have the power to make humans happy or bring them happiness. The faculty of understanding in the sense of *intellectus* is a faculty of seeing/thinking bestowed upon humans as part of God's infinite power. The third level of knowledge is the level within the sphere of *intellectus*, which enables the comprehension of the intrinsic truth of existence beyond the temporal constraints of thought, under the form of eternity. What enables the human mind to reach this level is, in addition to the knowledge of causes provided by *ratio*, the possession of a part of God's *Intellectus*, and the power to see and know things with this part under the form of eternity, that is, as a whole within the whole. Here, the object reveals itself to the capacity for direct understanding. Love arises from this level of knowledge.

The human mind only comprehends the essence of its object, the body, by uniting with the idea of God at the third level, that is, by knowing itself (Rızk, 2012, p. 127).[1] To know oneself, it is necessary to compre-

[1] In his *Short Treatise*, Spinoza describes the levels of knowledge through the lens of the competent person as follows: "Opinion often leads us into error. True belief is good only because it is the way to true knowledge, and awakens us to things which are really lovable. So that the final end that we seek, and the highest that we know, is true knowledge. But even this true knowledge varies with the objects that come before it; the better the object is with which it happens to unite itself, so much the better also is this knowledge. And, for this reason, he is the most perfect man who is united with God (who is the most perfect being of all), and so enjoys him" (Spinoza, 2002c, pp. 67–68).

hend the object of the mind's idea, that is, the body, and to form adequate ideas about it. The adequacy of an idea means that, when considered independently of the object it represents, it possesses all the characteristics of a true idea (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 244). Therefore, to say that one knows something is equivalent to saying that one possesses an adequate idea of that thing, that is, the knowledge of its cause.

Common notion: The junction where imagination meets reason

Perhaps the most important issues Spinoza grappled with were the 'things' that are products of the imagination. Knowing that he could not eliminate them entirely, he attempted to transform them into knowledge. Accordingly, the most fundamental way to remove misconceptions from the mind is knowledge of their causes. For this, the geometric method is necessary. However, in order for humans to free themselves from the everyday problems that have taken hold of them and to see/understand themselves as part of infinite existence, they need a third type of knowledge beyond the knowledge of causes or rationality. Many can transition to rationality, but the third level is one that very few can bear. For this, it is important to build a structure that attempts to transform ideas that lead to all kinds of misconceptions. This is an operation that transforms error into truth and our passions and behaviors from passivity to activity, without completely negating them and while partially preserving them: "The central difference between the imagination and reason is the contingency of the former and the necessity of the latter. The common notion operates the transformation that makes the imagination permanent; it is the passage to reason" (Hardt, 2002, p. 103).

In Spinoza, the process does not progress dialectically. The common notion does not negate imagination but includes/brings it into the sphere of reason; that is, it combines it with reason while preserving it. Therefore, reason and imagination are not opposing or mutually exclusive concepts. Thus, the power that enables reason to be freed from the myths constructed around it is, in turn, a product of reason: the common notion. In this sense, Spinoza does not exclude the first type of knowledge but rather makes it a springboard for his system. The imagination, which constitutes the first type of knowledge, enables the transition to the second and third types of knowledge. Unlike opinion and inspiration, which are not subject to the laws of combinability,

the imagination makes it possible to conceive of combinable relationships. In this respect, it is imagination that prepares the conditions for the formation of common notions.[2]

Common notions, as defined above, are ideas concerning the composition of relationships between multiple things. They are of central importance in establishing reasonable relationships/connections between individuals and in protecting the individual (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 104). Spinoza divides common notions into two categories: the most universal and the least universal. The most universal ones are the least useful. The least universal ones generally represent a similar combination between two bodies that are compatible with each other. The former is the theoretical subject of the *Ethica*, particularly Chapter 2. The latter is discussed in detail in Chapter 5 in terms of its practical function (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 104). Common notions with a constitutive aspect in terms of practical function are 'magical' keys that transform passion into action, the vague and fragmented into the adequate, and imagination into reason. Hardt states that if magic is to be sought here, it lies entirely in the act of transformation. This transformation process is essentially central to the practical constitution of reason (Hardt, 2002, p. 101).

Spinoza's theory posits that when a body defined by a specific relationship between motion and rest combines randomly with another body, a unity composed of the parts of the two bodies is formed. Common notions can only be adequately grasped when they are equally present in both the part

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[2] Huenemann draws attention to one point. According to him, common notions must attain a kind of special status by enabling us to access a privileged type of knowledge. But what is this status? (Huenemann, 2008, p. 100). Common notions are inherent in the nature/essence of thought because, due to their mental existence, they belong to the nature of the mind. This makes them inherent in every mind. This means that they are present in every being, since every physical entity has an idea. So, how can these notions, present in everyone's mind, elevate humans to the highest level of knowledge? What makes us more special than any other object? In Spinoza, not all ideas are equal. Each idea has its own power. The power of a human idea differs from that of the idea of any other living being. Since the human body is more capable than the bodies of other living beings in terms of capacity, and considering the parallelism between body and mind, ideas belonging to the body will also be more powerful. The conclusion drawn from this is that, in terms of the first level of knowledge, what distinguishes humans from other living beings and from one another is the ability to process imagination, which is the necessary path to attaining adequate knowledge.

and the whole (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 265; Huenemann, 2008, p. 9). With this understanding, they take on a biological meaning (Deleuze, 1988, p. 54). What is important here is the idea of harmony that occurs between multiple bodies. Second, there are certain things common to all bodies, whether they harmonize with each other or not: *extensio* and the principle of *motus et quies*. Ultimately, everything is combined under God's attributes. However, the conflict does not stem from common notions. To understand this, one must leave the realm of randomness and look at the situation from within.

Common notions are the only means by which people who are exposed to, forced to accept, or in need of inherently inadequate ideas can transform them into adequate ideas: they provide the key to the puzzle of how people can develop their powers of thought (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 90). Spinoza insists that these should not be confused with abstract and fictional concepts. What distinguishes common notions from abstract and fictional concepts is that they represent a unity of composition. In this respect, common notions are the means of understanding relationships as they are—in their true form: "In this sense, the common notions are more biological than mathematical, forming a natural geometry that allows us to comprehend the unity of the composition of all of Nature and the modes of variation of that unity" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 57).

Life is an area where modes encounter each other in terms of power—where they unite with each other, separate from each other, or defeat each other. In fact, in Spinoza, there is only composition in terms of the whole of nature; dissolution is not an issue. To say that both composition and dissolution exist in nature stems from our lack of understanding. Nature embraces all connections; therefore, only compositions occur in nature. When bodies encounter other bodies that increase their power, a communion is formed, and this gives them joy. In this respect, the constant relational state of bodies is the source of an ethical situation. To create shared notions, the composition of the relationship between bodies must exist in a way that brings joy and is in harmony with our existence. The practical function of common notions is to create common ground. Shared life makes it possible to organize relationships based on common notions (Gatens & Lloyd, 1999, p. 105). In other words, the emphasis on commonality refers only to the commonality of multiplicity by pushing uncertainties out of the mind; it does not eliminate differences but only allows us to form a small universal set

within the intersection of individuals. Otherwise, if a union were established by eliminating differences and considering only similarities, it would be called massification or collectivization rather than commonality; the aim here is not uniformity. A multitude formed by an encounter that increases the power of existence and action through individuals' understanding of common notions is always implicitly present; it emerges clearly and distinctly when the right conditions arise. Thus, common notions show that the development of reason and citizenship under the guidance of reason, through our shared effort to understand something we did not understand before, is linked to our mutual relationship with others and our ability to become something other than what we are (Hardt, 2002, p. 101).

Thus, the first adequate idea a person will have is the discovery of something common in the similarity between two bodies; this discovery leads to another discovery, which leads to another, and so on. Thanks to common notions, we go beyond the coincidences we observe by chance and grasp the harmony between modes, that is, the internal logic of the situation. Since a common relationship brings harmony, our power/strength of action necessarily increases.

The theory of common notions is the first step in preparing an ethical project in Spinoza. That is, the object of inquiry that enables us to take the first step toward the practical is the body. An analysis of the structure and relationships that constitute the body allows us to identify similarities between two bodies. Therefore, because we recognize the relationship between our body and another body, and because this encounter enables us to create a new relationship by achieving harmony through a common relationship, it is necessarily joyful. In other words, an analysis of the similarities and relationships between bodies provides the necessary criteria for choosing what is joyful, which is the 'first ethical choice' (Hardt, 2002, p. 96). In this choice, we gravitate toward harmonious encounters, that is, joyful passions, and avoid incompatible encounters, that is, sorrowful passions. This orientation and avoidance are themselves a choice, and this choice demonstrates that common notions are produced. This is because a common notion corresponds to the idea of the similarity of the composition between bodies. In this respect, the production of common notions is the first door that opens onto ethics.

Some commentators argue that the theme of common notions in Spinoza's philosophy points to an ontological break, a shift from speculation to practice (Spinoza, 2002, p. 100). At the practical stage, existence is no

longer a given order but rather a fabric woven from a tangle of combinable relationships. The problem is essentially one of ontological constitution. The most fundamental feature of this constitution is the expression of the causality of existence. The practical pursuit of common notions transforms an ontological inquiry into an ethical project. In other words, it shows how physical bodies and the theory of knowledge require each other and together create an ethical horizon.

Therefore, for Spinoza, the problem of knowledge is an ethical problem. Because it is an ethical problem, the levels of knowledge are related to modes of existence. What is the purpose/goal of knowing? The answer is clear: *eternal* happiness/bliss/satisfaction/fulfillment. Spinoza is the philosopher of a system in which ontology is linked to epistemology, and epistemology is linked to ethics; in fact, they are integrated. The connection between epistemic measures and modes of existence, and the parallelism between ethical and epistemic measures, facilitate the integration of epistemological concepts with those of ethics. That is, the truth of a thing and the certainty of that truth are based on the intrinsic relation of the idea to its reason. The adequacy of an idea is synonymous with its expression of reason. In this respect, expressing reason requires ontological analysis. This is because the adequacy of an idea is related to the structure and connections of existence. In fact, there is a parallelism between the characteristics of being and the characteristics of truth. The criteria that define *being* are the same as the criteria that make an idea true. Therefore, the analysis takes on an onto-epistemological character. Thus, the adequacy of an idea depends on its externalization of its own path of genesis/production. This path is necessarily determined by the structure and connections of being. In other words, our knowledge of being is measured by the number of our adequate ideas. Indeed, knowledge is formed as the power of thought is filled with adequate ideas. In Spinoza, the place where the issue of truth leads us and leaves us at the boundary is, therefore, the issue of power. By employing the characteristics of existence and power, he transforms the epistemological scene into an ethical one. This transformation is, in general, the answer to how we can reach adequate ideas in a context where a large part of human life is immersed in inadequate ideas. In short, the stones on the path that leads from inadequate ideas to adequate ones lead to the establishment of an ethical and, more specifically, religious architecture.

Conclusion

Spinoza, who examined the power of superstition that led people to strive for the slavery they embraced as if it were their freedom, targeted the theologies of church officials and clergy who sought to subjugate people. The aim is to expose the system that enslaves people by relying on so-called religious teachings in order to gain power. This act of disclosure is actually aimed at dismantling the display of transcendence constructed outside people by those in power, whose entire strength is derived from people. For Spinoza, reason is always in pursuit of a truth that constitutes reality. In contrast, faith is a set of doctrines that offers a personal recipe for salvation related to the individual's practical actions. However, because of the clergy, who impose other characteristics on faith related to the sphere of human action, individuals cannot find the opportunity to live in an ethical and political order in which they can experience freedom or actualize their potential. If faith is freed from these burdens, it can have a positive effect on people in the practical sphere. Thus, imagination, which initially appears as the source of error, can make an important contribution to the development of reason. In other words, beliefs can be beneficial in organizing communal life in a way that incorporates many irrational elements that serve the development of reason. So, what is the role of imagination in the development of the intellect? In Spinoza's philosophy, each emotion contains the nature of an external body with which the individual interacts or to which the individual is connected through the nature of their own body. In this respect, emotion contains both a unique structure and a common element. Therefore, in passive or inadequate connections, imagination can produce passive and common affections. In other words, in inadequate encounters, imagination can contribute to the development of the intellect through its effort to create common notions that sprout from the idea of harmony. Thus, a system free from dogmas that cause or may cause debate can be established within the emerging universal belief system (Spinoza, 2007, p. 182).

Therefore, imagination and intellect are concepts belonging to two separate spheres. The distinguishing feature of the intellect is its ability to recognize and encompass imagination, that is, its capacity for knowledge. Through this ability to know, the imagination, which is the source of error, is harnessed to develop the intellect and increase the power of action. In this context, religious beliefs and explanations—while not entirely eliminating

superstitions—are transformed by imagination. Spinoza advocates for the struggle for freedom of thought and expression alongside this operation of the imagination. In doing so, he restricts religion-based views of power concerning the sphere of action and, just as importantly, removes the veil of transcendence that camouflages power, revealing that the thing called power is a structure built by the power of the people themselves.

An ethics based on Spinoza's ideas is a wholly naturalistic doctrine or way of life that states that we will become competent through understanding/knowing our own nature, as opposed to a moral system that offers a recipe for good and evil to which people must conform in their actions. This is because there is nothing in our nature that prevents us from existing or hinders our power to live. Therefore, the very act of reflecting on what exists is an act that prepares the ethical, and the only ethical thing in life is to organize encounters that will increase our power to act and to distance ourselves from those that will diminish it. However, we must find a way to increase our power to act by organizing encounters with modes that are compatible with our own nature, through points of compatibility. In other words, to make the state of nature livable, we must organize random encounters. In the natural state, where humans search randomly for what is useful to them, they strive to destroy bodies that do not match or combine with their own. However, if people organize themselves in pursuit of what is useful, they try to meet within relationships that are compatible with those of others. This second effort is the true benefit that should be pursued. While pursuing the true benefit, we will of course encounter some negative situations, but we strive to combine our relationship with relationships that are compatible with ours in every way. This effort yields the maximum level of joyful emotion. Thus, our power to act increases as much as possible. Here, the true meaning of *conatus* emerges: the effort to carry out an action that, guided by reason, leads to adequate ideas and, consequently, effective emotions. What determines virtue is the continuity of this effort. Virtue is the effort to preserve one's existence by acting in accordance with the laws of human nature (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 323). The highest virtue of the mind is understanding. Virtue is a desire, born of joy, that grasps the ontological necessity of things in relation to the infinite at the third level of knowledge. Therefore, what is called virtue is actually the activity of organizing the experience of the blurred perceptions to which we are exposed in passivity in accordance with the knowledge of the necessity that prevails in nature.

In Spinoza, the highest thing that a mind, which is active as long as it understands, can comprehend is God as an absolutely infinite being (Della Rocca, 2008, p. 187). The knowledge of God is the highest good of a mind (Spinoza, 2007, p. 60). As the highest good of the mind, knowledge of God is the guarantor of all our other knowledge. Everything in nature expresses the concept of God to some degree. Hearing this voice requires recognizing what is natural. As our knowledge of natural things increases, we arrive at the divine. Knowledge of the divine is the common good of all who pursue virtue. This commonality arises from the natural necessity of reason. Everyone rejoices equally in this commonality and experiences the pleasure of sharing their joy with others. This desire is, in fact, the essence of the mind. As the knowledge of God preserved/contained in the essence of the mind increases, the mind will strive to make the good it desires for itself accessible to everyone. In this context, the actions the mind performs simply because it possesses knowledge of God will be good and beneficial.

Here is the measure of the new religion and the new piety in Spinoza: "Whatever we desire and do, whereof we are the cause insofar as we have the idea of God, that is, insofar as we know God, I refer to Religion [*religio*]. The desire to do good which derives from our living by the guidance of reason, I call Piety [*pietas*]" (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 339). Divine knowledge is dependent on the systematic understanding of causes. At this stage, it is no longer a religion of imagination, but one of understanding. Understanding that the infinite existence reached by attempting to relate the causes and patterns of things to common relationships is an inherent necessity of reality is the highest good of the mind: "The desire to know God leads to the third type of knowledge and the true pleasure of existence. Under these conditions, the ethics approach and speculative desire coincide within what can be called the *experience of infinity*" (Rızk, 2012, p. 263). In Spinoza, the speculative path of knowledge and the ethical path of individual and social liberation express/follow one and the same route. The mind can only know its own essence by grasping the necessity of the infinite. The condition for knowing its own essence is an ethical encounter in ethics realized through the experience of the body.

As can be understood from the criterion of the new piety, a person must first and foremost know themselves. Knowing oneself means knowing one's body and bodily parts, one's mind and mental parts, along with their causes,

in a proper manner. Only in this way can one comprehend that they are in God under the form of eternity:

> Eternity is the very essence of God insofar as this essence involves necessary existence (Def. 8, I). Therefore, to conceive things under a form of eternity is to conceive things insofar as they are conceived through God's essence as real entities; that is, insofar as they involve existence through God's essence (Spinoza, 2002a, p. 376).

According to the new conception of religion, a religious person knows that everything that happens in nature occurs by necessity from divine nature and that, therefore, labeling events as bad essentially stems from ignorance, which causes us to perceive things inadequately within the confines of time and space. The devout person is aware that the awareness of necessity is freedom. With this awareness, they understand things based on the relationships that bind them together and the circumstances that separate them, defining them according to their nature or power. Thus, they do not get stuck between hope and fear and need no transcendent power or myth.

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Author Note

Mehmet Fatih Elmas is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Bursa Uludağ University, Türkiye. His MA focused on Spinoza and his PhD on Levinas. His research centers on modern philosophy, metaphysics, and ethics, with a particular interest in the intersections of ethical responsibility, religious thought, and contemporary philosophy. Email: mfelmas@uludag.edu.tr

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