

The Love of God and its Relation to the Third Kind of Knowledge in Spinoza

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Spinoza's three kinds of knowledge—imagination, reason, and intuition—are frequently discussed in the scholarship. What is less frequently discussed is his distinction between the ordinary love of God and the intellectual love of God. This paper intends to show that reason corresponds to the ordinary love of God and that intuition corresponds to the intellectual love of God. The notions of intuition and intellectual love often mystify Spinoza readers; showing that, and how, they are interconnected sheds light on their respective meanings. Initially, it is unclear why Spinoza introduces the third kind of knowledge (intuition) at all, and why he considers it superior to the second kind (reason), given that they are both equally truthful. As he writes: “knowledge of the first kind is the only cause of falsity; knowledge of the second and third kind is necessarily true” (E2, Prop 41). The first part of this essay aims to answer the question: why does Spinoza introduce the third kind of knowledge into his system? Or put differently: What is the question to which the third kind of knowledge is the answer?¹ The answer, in short, is that Spinoza introduces the third kind of knowledge to answer the question: What kind of knowledge necessarily leads to intellectual love of God, or, What kind of knowledge can be prescribed to God himself? The second part of the essay addresses how this kind of knowledge is possible and how it works.

What is the Question to Which the Third Kind of Knowledge is the Answer?

Steven Nadler shows that Spinoza distinguishes between an ordinary love of God and an intellectual love of God. It can be added that this distinction highlights the difference between

¹This is taken from the title of Robert Pippin's essay: “What is the Question for which Hegel's Theory of Recognition is the Answer?”.

the second and third kinds of knowledge, as reason is responsible for the ordinary love of God and intuition is responsible for the intellectual love of God.²

Spinoza writes that “love towards God is the highest good that we can aim at according to the dictates of reason” (E5, prop 20, proof). This line underscores, in fact, a *limitation* of reason, whose highest good is the love of God but not the *intellectual* love of God, which gets introduced (at least by name) 12 propositions later (E5, prop 32 Corollary). Therefore, reason is correlated with the ordinary love of God, although, as we are also led to understand from this passage, reason does not necessarily entail this love. It is reason’s highest possible achievement, but not intrinsic to it. Throughout the rest of part 5, the intellectual love of God is associated exclusively with the third kind of knowledge, and never with reason.

Of the intellectual love of God, introduced in proposition 32, Spinoza writes:

From the third kind of knowledge there necessarily arises the intellectual love of God. For this kind of knowledge there arises pleasure accompanied by the idea of God as cause, that is (Def. of Emotions 6), the love of God not in so far as we imagine him as present (Pr. 29, V) but in so far as we understand God to be eternal. And this is what I call the intellectual love of God. (E5, Prop 32, Corollary)

And so, whereas the love of God is “the highest good” of reason, under the third kind of knowledge the intellectual love of God arises *necessarily*.³ Even if there were no further difference between reason and intuition, or between intellectual and ordinary love of God (which

²Sanem Soyarslan seems to hint at this idea in her essay, which is discussed later.

³ Similar sentiment is expressed in E5, Prop 42 where Spinoza says, “Blessedness consists in love towards God (Pr. 36, V and Sch.), a love that arises from the third kind of knowledge”. The proposition he cites here as proof also refers to the intellectual love.

there is), the fact that love of God *necessarily* arises from the third kind of knowledge would put it above reason.

In answer to the question, ‘why does Spinoza introduce intuition into his system?’ we can now respond that it leads to the intellectual love of God. However, this is not a full answer to the question because it opens a new one, namely, ‘why doesn’t reason suffice?’. To answer this question, we must first examine the difference between the ordinary love of God and the intellectual love of God and see why reason is restricted to the former.

Steven Nadler argues that the differentiating factor between the ordinary love of God and the intellectual love is that the former comes about as a remedy to the passions and the latter does not (Nadler 300). The ordinary love of God comes about by the mind relating clear and distinct conceptions of emotions to God as their cause. Spinoza states: “he who clearly and distinctly understands himself and his emotions feels pleasure (E3, Prop 53) accompanied by the idea of God (Proceeding Prop). So he loves God” (E5, Prop 15, Proof). The thought is that when a passion is understood, through reason, we pass to a state of greater perfection because it no longer negatively affects us. This passage to a state of greater perfection caused by understanding is pleasure (E3, Definition of the Emotions 2). We then attribute our understanding, which gave rise to this pleasure, to God, we feel pleasure accompanied by God as cause, which is love (E3, Definition of the Emotions 6)⁴.

The ordinary love’s connection with the passions also relates it to the body. Spinoza writes:

⁴ In E5, Prop 20, Schl. Spinoza lays out very similar steps. However, in step 4 he says that we can relate those affections to common properties of things *or* God, as a remedy to confused passions. The argument is that we can lessen emotions, without necessarily knowing God is the cause, by linking them to common notions. However, this would not include the love of God along with the lessening of the passion.

We may conclude that this love towards God is the most constant of all the emotions, and in so far as it is related to the body it cannot be destroyed except together with the body. As to its nature it is related solely to the mind, this we shall examine later on. (E5, Prop 20, Schl.)

Spinoza goes on to state at the end of this scholium that “now it is time to pass on to those matters that concern the duration of the mind without the respect to the body” (E5, Prop 20, Schl.). For the rest of the *Ethics* Spinoza writes about the intellectual love of God not the ordinary love towards God. The implication is that love towards God, insofar as it is related to the body, is the ordinary love, and insofar as it is solely related to the mind, it is intellectual love.

As a result of the intellectual love of God being related solely to the mind, there is no movement from a state of lesser perfection to greater perfection. Nadler writes: “Unlike the ordinary love of God, the intellectual love of God is eternal. It is not a matter of joy that arises from converting an episodic passion or inadequate idea into an adequate idea, a process that occurs in duration” (Nadler 306). With no body involved, episodic passions cannot arise, therefore we cannot convert them to adequate ideas using reason. Regarding the joy felt through the intellectual love of God Spinoza writes: “If pleasure consists in the transition to a state of greater perfection, blessedness must surely consist in this, that the mind is endowed with perfection itself” (E5, Prop 33, Schl). The joy in the third kind of knowledge, which gives rise to the intellectual love of God, is therefore intrinsic to the cognition.

Additionally, there cannot be a passage to a state of greater perfection in the intellectual love of God because, Spinoza writes, “God loves himself with an infinite intellectual love” (E5, Prop 35). One might be concerned here that there is a difference between *God's* intellectual love

of himself, which is infinite, and the intellectual love of God which may be attributed to the human mind. But no such distinction exists. Spinoza stresses that "the mind's intellectual love towards God is part of the infinite love wherewith God loves himself" (E5, Prop 36). The intellectual love must, therefore, be ascribable to God himself, ours being part thereof. A passage to a state of greater perfection, by contrast, cannot be ascribed to God because God is the highest degree of perfection (E2, Def 6). Consequently, the intellectual love of God contains no passage to a state of greater perfection but is perfection itself.

To conclude our analysis of the difference between the ordinary love of God and the intellectual love of God, we raised five key points: 1) The ordinary love of God arises from reason, although not necessarily. 2) The intellectual love of God arises necessarily from intuition. 3) The ordinary love of God is related to the body while the intellectual love of God is related solely to the mind. 4) In the ordinary love passions pass to a state of greater perfection, whereas the intellectual love is infinite and perfection itself. 5) The intellectual love of God is attributable to God himself, which cannot be the case with ordinary love as it involves passage to greater perfection.⁵

We can now understand, at least partially, Spinoza's motivation for creating the third kind of knowledge. The first criterion was that he needed to find a kind of knowledge that would allow for the intellectual love of God. The second criterion was that this kind of knowledge must also be something that could be ascribed to God himself. The question to which intuition is the answer is: *What kind of knowledge necessarily leads to intellectual love of God, and could be*

⁵ Regarding God as an external cause I do suspect that reason conceives of God as a transitive cause whereas intuition conceives of God as an immanent cause. However, I am reluctant about this claim because reason obviously does not lead to error and to state God is a transitive cause of things is an error (E1, Prop 18). Now it could be that God is conceived as an external cause under reason without that being the same as an transitive cause but I am not sure how that could be the case.

ascribed to God himself? Since we now know what Spinoza's goal was in creating the third kind of knowledge, we can turn to examine how it works.

How Does the Third Kind of Knowledge Work?

How does intuition work? What is it about the kind of cognition, under the third kind of knowledge, that necessarily results in the intellectual love of God? What is known through the third kind of knowledge? The answers to these questions are still quite unclear, but we have some clues as to the direction needed to answer them.

The first thing to investigate is what exactly reason is. When Spinoza first lays out the different kinds of knowledge, he writes:

From all that has already been said it is quite clear that we perceive many things and form universal notions:

1. Firstly, individual objects presented to us through the senses in a fragmentary (mutilated) and confused manner without any intellectual order (see Cor.Pr.29,II); and therefore I call such perceptions 'knowledge from casual experience.'
2. Secondly, from symbols. For example, from having heard or read certain words we call things to mind that we form certain ideas of them similar to those through which we imagine things (Sch.Pr.18, II).

Both of these ways of regarding things I shall in future refer to as 'knowledge of the first kind,' 'opinion' or 'imagination.'

3. Thirdly, from the fact that we have common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things (see Cor.Pr.38 and 39 with its Cor., and Pr.40,II). I shall refer to this as ‘reason’ and ‘knowledge of the second kind.’

Apart from these two kinds of knowledge there is, as I shall later show, a third kind of knowledge, which I shall refer to as ‘intuitive.’ This kind of knowledge proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate understanding of the essence of things” (E2, Prop 40, Schl 2).

In this passage, Spinoza clearly demarcates the third kind of knowledge from the other two. First Spinoza does this by not listing the third kind of knowledge under the heading of [kinds of knowledge] that “form universals.” Secondly, he does this by stating that intuition is “apart from [these] kinds of knowledge.” Spinoza cannot associate the third kind of knowledge with universals. This is because, as we have established, intuition must be a kind of knowledge prescribable to God, since it leads to the intellectual love of God. In letter 19 to William de Blyenbergh Spinoza argues that God does not perceive through universals (Cf Melamed 102): “Now God does not know things in abstraction, nor does he formulate general definitions of that kind” (Letter 19). For Spinoza, general definitions and abstractions would both qualify as universals (E4, Proposition 40, Schl).

Common interpretations of intuition or *scientia intuitiva* seem to suggest that it entails knowledge of the causal chain of a particular thing. Garrett argues: “*Scientia intuitiva* ... follows the causal order of nature, moving from cognition of causes to cognition of effects, beginning with adequate cognition of an attribute of God ... proceeding to the formal essence of things ... [and] grasping along the way the infinite modes that constitute the laws of nature” (106 and 110).

Melamed seems to have a similar idea when he writes: “As far as I can see, *scientia intuitiva* is cognition *in one glance* — just like a map — of the complete causal ancestry of a certain thing” (Melamed 112).⁶ Garrett argues that the causal ancestry of intuition only involves infinite modes.

Garrett’s point that Spinoza argues that intuition begins with an adequate cognition of an attribute of God is clearly supported by this passage: “This kind of knowledge [intuition] proceeds from an adequate idea of the formal essence of certain attributes of God to an adequate knowledge of the essence of things” (E2, Prop 40, Schl 2). What exactly “the formal essence” of certain attributes is unclear, since the attributes are themselves the essence of God. It would seem to imply that there is an essence of the essence of God, which is strange. (Melamed 116) It seems more likely that what Spinoza is getting at in this line is that to proceed from “the formal essence of certain attributes” means to cognize directly under a single attribute.

Garrett, takes this further by arguing that the attributes are the *beginning* of the causal chain connecting God with specific things. In defense of Garrett’s interpretation, Spinoza does not rule out that there are other things in the causal chain. However, Spinoza does not say anything that directly implies that there are such things in the causal chain either. Spinoza merely states that intuition begins with “certain attributes of God” and ends with adequate knowledge of a specific essence. It is possible that Spinoza is just stating the beginning and end steps, but I find nothing to suggest that there are more steps in between. Spinoza makes a similar statement in part 5: “The third kind of knowledge proceeds from the adequate idea of certain of God’s attributes to the adequate knowledge of the essence of things” (E5, Prop 25). This line is similar to the one cited above in stating that the third kind of knowledge begins with an attribute and

⁶ Melamed develops this more by citing the TIE.

then moves to conceiving the essence of things from that attribute. Again this line does not truly support or deny Garrett.

It is worth considering the example Spinoza gives of how intuition works to see if it provides evidence for the causal chain interpretation. Spinoza writes:

I shall illustrate all these kinds of knowledge by one single example. Three numbers are given; it is required to find a fourth which is related to the third as the second to the first. Tradesmen have no hesitation in multiplying the second by the third and dividing the product by the first, either because they have not yet forgotten the rule they learn without proof from their teachers, or because they have in fact found this correct in the case of very simple numbers, or else from the force of the proof of Proposition 19 of the Seventh Book of Euclid, to wit, the common property of proportionals. But in the case of very simple numbers, none of this is necessary. For example, in the case of the given numbers 1, 2, 3, everybody can see that the fourth proportional is 6, and all the more clearly because we infer in one single intuition the fourth number from the ratio we can see the first number bears to the second. (E2, Prop 40, Schl 2)

Under this example, reason uses adequate ideas, the proofs of Euclid, to find the missing proportional. This proof would be an example of a universal notion, which Spinoza attributes to reason. However, under intuition, there is no use of universal notions, it is rather knowledge through the essence of things. Initially, this example seems to negate the causal chain interpretation since “we infer in one single intuition the fourth number”. This appears to conflict with the idea of the cognition involving a beginning and end with further steps in between.

However, Garrett argues: “Spinoza cannot mean that we are unable to distinguish ordered steps within it [intuition] but rather that these steps, proceeding as they do directly from ideas of essences, will not require any quasi syllogistic operations with generalizations and their instances” (Garrett 110).⁷ This leaves the door open for the causal ancestry interpretation since it could be that there are other steps in there that take place all at once, or in a very rapid succession. However, again, it is difficult to find anything that would directly support or necessitate this assumption.

There are things we can safely conclude from the example, though. Spinoza indicates that we can know the answer because of the relation between the numbers; we can *see* the ratio that the first bears to the second. We understand the solution from the nature, or essence, of the way the numbers interact with one another. From Spinoza’s explanation and example, we can gather three things: 1) intuition does not involve knowledge of universals; 2) intuition is obtained directly through one attribute; 3) intuition is knowledge of essence.

Initially, it is not evident why Spinoza would emphasize that the third kind of knowledge is knowledge through an attribute, since all of our knowledge is knowledge under one attribute or another (E2, Prop 7). However, Spinoza does so to underscore the contrast with knowing things through a *mode* under an attribute. Cognizing something under a universal notion would be an example of this.

⁷ Melamed’s defense of the causal chain interpretation is also quite interesting. He argues that Spinoza chose a mathematical example precisely because after the abstraction to numbers “we are not required to further trace the causes of this essence: numbers (qua abstractions) do not refer to the causes” (115). I do agree that the fact that Spinoza’s example uses numbers is significant. Although, it seems more likely that he chooses numbers in his example because numbers have already been abstracted from the affects of the body, therefore they relate solely to the mind.

The textual evidence that Melamed and Garrett both cite in support of their interpretation comes from different points in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*. Melamed's interpretation is more compelling in this regard:

[I]n §85 of the TIE Spinoza notes that in the case of a true idea “its objective effects proceed in the soul according to the formal nature of its object. This is the same as what the ancients said, i.e, that true knowledge proceeds from cause to effect.” Employing the scholastic distinction between formal and objective features, Spinoza claims in this passage that a true idea maps and reflects the causal structure of its objects. Thus, it is clear I believe that for Spinoza an intuition —being a true idea — is not an isolated perception that is unrelated to any other cognition, but rather it must be embedded in the true reflection, in the intellect of the causal structure of nature.” (Melamed 113)

Melamed is right in arguing that this passage does seem to imply that true ideas reflect the intuited object's causal structure; however, it does not support the idea that there is anything other than the proximate cause in that reflection.

The second reason it is unlikely there is anything in the causal intuition chain, aside from the essence of God and the essence that is being cognized, is that Spinoza states that God is the immediate cause of things directly following from his attributes. He writes: “God is absolutely the proximate cause of things directly produced by him” (E1, Prop 28, Schl.). For Spinoza things directly produced by God are the infinite modes, which “necessarily follow from the absolute nature of some attribute of God” (E1, Prop 22). This is opposed to finite modes which “have a determinate existence” and “cannot exist or be determined to act unless it be determined to exist

and to act by another cause which is also finite and has a determinate existence” (E1, Prop 28). This means that God is not the proximate cause of the durational existence of finite modes since they do not follow from the “absolute nature of some attribute of God.”⁸

On its face it seems that the third kind of knowledge contains knowledge of finite modes, since it is a knowledge of particular things. The important distinction is that it is a knowledge of the *essence* of particular things. The distinction is important because, as Garrett argues, formal essences have the same ontological status as infinite modes (Garrett 104).⁹ This means that God is the proximate cause of the essence of finite modes but not of their durational existence. Melamed explains the difference: “The carpenter (i.e., God qua the carpenter) explains the *existence* of the table, whereas extension (i.e., God qua extension) explains the *essence* of the table” (Melamed 107). The table, in so far as we consider its durational existence as a finite mode, has a causal chain of other finite modes.¹⁰ The table, in so far as its essence is being considered, is directly caused by God’s infinite essence. God is the proximate cause of essence which implies that there is nothing else in the causal chain aside from the essence of God, or the attribute, and the essence. Therefore, the causal chain for intuition is from attribute (God’s

⁸ While everything is ultimately caused by God, Spinoza does allow, and uses himself, distinctions between distances of causes. He writes: “It follows, secondly, that God cannot properly be said to be the remote cause of individual things, unless perchance for the purpose of distinguishing these things from things which he has produced directly, or rather, things which follow from his absolute nature” (E1, Prop 28, Schl.).

⁹ An objection could be raised here that actual essences, as opposed to formal essence, are not of the same ontological status as infinite modes. Therefore, they do not qualify as things directly produced by God. Although it is questionable if the distinction between actual essence and formal essence, insofar as they are both contained in the essence of God, does not hold. As Soyarslan argues: “I hold that conceiving of the actual essence of a singular thing is just conceiving of its formal essence. This is because conceiving of the former is nothing but conceiving of the existence of the singular thing insofar as it is comprehended in God’s attributes—that is, the kind of existence Spinoza distinguishes from determinate durational existence not only in EVP29S and EIIP, but also in EIIP8 and EIIP8C” (Soyarslan 38).

¹⁰ To be clear Garrett, in his interpretation, does not say that the causal ancestry in intuition is the causal ancestry of finite modes. He says it is the causal ancestry of infinite modes. However, as stated above this cannot be the case because Spinoza is clear that God is the proximate cause of infinite modes. Therefore, there is no causal chain of the infinite modes (E1, Prop 28, Schl.)

essence) to (particular) essence. Contrarily, under reason the causal chain is from universal mode to particular mode, under an attribute.¹¹

My reading supports the “content interpretation” of the third kind of knowledge as outlined by Sanem Soyarslan. To summarize her position, she writes: “I argue that the distinction between reason and intuitive knowledge includes a difference in content in that there is something that can be known by intuition—namely, the unique essences of things—that cannot be known by reason” (Soyarslan 28). The alternative to this would be the “method interpretation” which argues that the only difference between reason and intuition is the way they go about achieving their knowledge. My reading further supports the content view because it argues that God is the proximate cause of what is known in the third kind of knowledge. Therefore, the third kind of knowledge is a knowledge of essences and not of the durational existence of finite things, of which God cannot be the proximate cause.¹² If reason entailed knowledge of essences, then God would accompany this knowledge as proximate cause. Although, as established above, Spinoza states that reason “relates” what it knows to God as cause instead of having God as the basis of that knowledge, which is ultimately the reason that love of God is not entailed in reason necessarily, and that this love is not the intellectual love of God.

Conclusion

¹¹ This might have the implication that God does not have knowledge of the durational existence of finite things. While this is certainly a strange implication that would require further elucidation, I do not think it undermines the argument outright. It likely implies that knowledge of durational things is in some way illusory.

¹² One could, perhaps, argue that the intellectual love of God also is ‘content’ that exists only in intuition. However, one could also argue that the intellectual love of God is just a result of the differing ‘method’ of knowledge and not part of its content.

Spinoza's goal in invoking the notion of intuitive knowledge was to account for a kind of knowledge that reaches the intellectual love of God, and that God himself would be capable of. The third kind of knowledge is not merely a more powerful or "higher" kind of knowledge than reason (as suggested by the epithet, "third"); it is fundamentally *different*, different in kind, because it alone leads to the intellectual love of God. We can know God as the immediate cause of finite modes, insofar as knowledge of the third kind can give us knowledge of their essences. Essences, unlike the existence of finite modes, do not need a finite mode as cause, and can have God as their immediate cause. Hopefully, understanding what Spinoza's goal was in outlining his idea of intuition will help shed light on the still remaining mysteries of the third kind of knowledge.

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