

what constitutes trustworthiness and in what circumstances it is appropriate to trust—nor from asking questions about the importance of making distinctions between when we might be relying upon others as opposed to trusting them. The aim of this discussion has been to understand the ways in which trust is present in perception, thus is operative in the spaces where crossovers imperceptibly take place and the co-constitution of our intersubjective existence occurs. Relations of trust are deeply rooted in the body as our opening onto the world. Whereas accounts of trust typically emphasize intersubjectivity, a phenomenological account emphasizes our experience of what our fundamentally intercorporeal existence is like, here understood not simply as the interrelationship of embodied subjects, but as a manner of belonging to an ontology of flesh and its characteristic depth.²⁸

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THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION IN SPINOZA AND SHANKARA

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Philosophers from traditions that are not only entirely different but apparently uninfluenced by each other sometimes show remarkable similarities. In the case of Spinoza and Shankara such similarities include the dual-aspect model according to which the apparent pluralism of the world rests on an inadequate perception of its oneness, and the way the overcoming of that inadequacy is conceived as a liberation from the passions and an achievement of immortality. A significant difference between the two, however, is that Spinoza's explanations are epistemologically conceived while Shankara's are conceived ontologically. Not that Spinoza lacked an ontology or Shankara an epistemology, but rather their explanatory approaches emphasize the differences of the worlds within which they wrote.

The ways in which the thought of Spinoza and Shankara converge and diverge are indicative both of the way in which philosophy can never completely escape its culture, but also of the possibility of comparable experiences within cultures that developed from different roots—the way in which philosophers from radically different cultures, writing not only in different languages but using entirely different conceptual frameworks, could have comparable perceptions of the nature of reality and wisdom.¹ Thus Shankara in early 9th century India² and Spinoza in late 17th century Holland both saw the world as ultimately a single substance that they equated with God, and proposed ways of disciplining our thinking to overcome our initial perception of the world as aggregation of individual substances. Comparing the two gives us a concrete look at how much of that

¹ Walter Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator" (in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* [New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1968], 69–82) and Donald Davidson's "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (*Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, vol. 47 [1973–74]: 5–20) touch on this issue in very different ways.

² Western scholars have traditionally accepted the dates 788–820 for his life but the evidence is uncertain. See Natalia Isayeva, *Shankara and Indian Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY, 1993), 83–87.

perception—or at least its expression—seems dependent on cultural factors (as well as on the individuality of the writers), and how much seems to transcend such factors. The main points of comparison will be their respective methods as well as their conceptions of God, knowledge, freedom, and immortality.

I. Method

On the surface two writers could hardly be more dissimilar. Spinoza's *Ethics* is presented in the most linear possible way, beginning with definitions and axioms and deriving its conclusions with every effort at rigorous logical precision, while Shankara's major works are commentaries on the Upanishads and especially the *Vedānta-Sūtras*. Even his two most systematic works of undoubted authenticity, the first 121-brief paragraphs of the *Upadesa Sahasri* ("Thousand Teachings") and the 68-brief paragraphs of the *Atma Bodha* ("Knowledge of the Self")—as well as the longer but less certainly authentic *Vivekachudamani* (*Crest Jewel of Discrimination*)³—are non-linear in organization. Where Spinoza's *Ethics* claims to demonstrate its conclusions with logical and even mathematical rigour, Shankara employs no obvious arguments but relies on his readers to recognize the truth of his claims from their own inner experience—more like the direct evidence of phenomenology than the indirect evidence of logical inference. Again, while Spinoza aims to clear the decks of the traditional beliefs that prejudice his readers against what he believes would be clearly seen to be true by an unbiased intellect⁴, Shankara explicitly builds on the traditions established by

³ In favour of its authenticity, see P. George Victor, *Life and Teachings of Adi Sankaracarya* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 2002), 49, 97. Against, see Jennifer Suthren Hirst, *Sankara's Advaita Vedanta: A Way of Teaching*. (London & NY: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 23. I have not hesitated to cite the *Vivekachudamani* where its doctrines clearly accord with Shankara's undisputed works because, as George Victor puts it, it "contains the cardinal truths of Advaita Vedanta in simple terms without ambiguous disputations" (*Life and Teachings*, 100).

⁴ See for example the beginning of the Appendix to Part I. This aspect of Spinoza's project is especially emphasized by Steven Smith throughout *Spinoza's Book of Life: Freedom and Redemption in the Ethics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). In *Spinoza and Buddha: Visions of a Dead God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), S.M. Melamed argues that the traditional beliefs of Judaism play no part in Spinoza's philosophy, in opposition to the "many commentators, critics, and historians [who] have cried that Spinoza's excommunication was not justified since his doctrine was traceable to Jewish sources." (136) He argues that there is a "line extending from the Upanishads to Buddha, St. Paul, St. August-

the Upanishads and *Bhagavad-Gita*, and his most important writings are sympathetic commentaries on classical texts.

A more careful look at their writings shows that matters are not so simple. Despite Shankara's use of traditional texts when they provide a conceptual framework for his ideas, he had no hesitation in departing from them when he disagreed.⁵ For example, "Anything that is eternal cannot have a beginning despite a hundred texts (to the contrary)," and "The deluded fools, believing the rites inculcated by the Vedas and the Smritis to be the highest, do not understand."⁶

tine, and Spinoza" (5, cf. 299–363), and that mysticism was no part of traditional Judaism. For all his erudition, however, Melamed never mentions the *Zohar*. He does mention Hassidism, but after acknowledging that it arose independently of Spinoza, he circumvents this counter-example to his thesis by means of a non-sequitur: "Chasidism – although it is not a consequence of, is a parallel to, Spinozism.... [There is a] deep-rooted pantheistic tendency in Chasidism. In view of these facts, the assertion is justified that Spinoza's influence on the cultural process of his own race in modern times was almost as powerful as was his influence upon the general cultural process in the West." (146–47) Melamed's antipathy to Spinoza is continually in evidence (even apart from the book's subtitle): Spinoza was not only "the patron saint of Lenin's state" (30) and "the official philosopher of Red Russia" (31), "Spinoza was actually responsible for the cultural anti-Semitism of modern Europe." (147)

⁵ Although George Victor writes, "Sankaracarya asserts that scripture (*sastra*) is the only source of knowledge to decide what is good and what is bad. Consequently, he is of the opinion that an individual cannot rely upon himself for the knowledge of good and bad" (*Life and Teachings*, 114, cf. 149), later he says, "When Sankara says that the scriptures or the Veda are eternal and infallible, he means that the rituals are intended for the lower state and the study of Upanishads for the higher state." (*ibid.*, 127) Both statements are true if we distinguish between beginners and advanced students: until we have overcome our attachments our own judgments are unreliable, and following religious teachings can help us rise above our self-centeredness in much the same way that the "sure maxims of life" do for Spinoza (*Ethics*, Book V, prop. 10, scholium), and the requirements of "propriety" (*li*) for Confucius. But ultimately we must be able to go beyond the limitations of words. In what follows, quotations from the *Ethics* are taken (occasionally with minor modifications) from *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, (ed. and tr.) E. Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) and referred to parenthetically as E followed by Book number and using the following abbreviations: a = axiom, c = corollary, d = definitions, p = proposition, s = scholium.

⁶ The former is from his Taittiriya Upanishad commentary Part I, chapter xi, section 4 ("to the contrary" is the translator's amplification) and the latter is from his Mundaka Upanishad commentary, Part I, chapter ii, section 10. Both are taken from *Eight Upanishads, with the Commentary of Sankaracarya*, in two volumes, (tr.) S. Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957–1958), here respectively from vol. I, p. 275 and vol. II, p. 99. The Taittiriya Upanishad is henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as TU and the Mundaka Upani-

So Shankara's appeals to the inner experience of his audience has nothing to do with religious faith where doctrines are accepted on the basis of an external authority. As for Spinoza's turning of his back on tradition, although this is true in the way his ideas are presented, the ideas themselves are often indebted to his predecessors⁷, if less evidently than in the case of Shankara, and his recommendation that people who have not yet become rationally self-sufficient should follow the "sure maxims of life" (E, Vp10s) is meant in much the same spirit as Shankara's recommendation of scripture for those who have not yet grasped the nature of reality for themselves.

The centrality of the geometrical method to Spinoza's philosophy is a matter of some controversy, although there is general agreement that it "certainly does not represent the way and order in which Spinoza discovered his truths."⁸ His earlier *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being* (1660), written in an Aristotelian style (but with a brief appendix that summarizes his argument in geometrical fashion), and his *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (1662), presented as an intellectual autobiography, show that the geometrical method of the *Ethics* (1677) may function more as a device of presentation than a device of discovery. Indeed he must have recognized that the geometrical method, however valuable it may be to clarity of exposition, had limitations as a science of investigation, since he had already used the same method to present the philosophy of Descartes, with which Spinoza substantially disagreed. Spinoza understood that from different preliminary definitions arise different models of reality. Thus in the *Principles of Descartes' Philosophy* Spinoza defines substance this way:

shad as MU, followed by Part, chapter and section numbers and then by volume and page numbers separated by a slash. Throughout, bracketed insertions within quotations are mine while those in parentheses are the translator's.

⁷ The influences on Spinoza are documented extensively by Harry Wolfson in *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934).

⁸ Steven Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 39. Some writers have argued that the geometrical method is irrelevant to Spinoza's philosophy, others that it is indispensable to it. After reviewing the arguments on both sides Nadler concludes that Spinoza's philosophy "finds its most adequate (but not necessary only) expression in that mode of presentation." (43) Michael Della Rocca makes the stronger claim that for Spinoza there is "no other way of doing philosophy than in geometrical fashion" in his *Spinoza* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 11.

Every object to which belongs as a subject, some property, or quality, or attribute, or through which some things which we perceive exist, or of which we have some real idea is called *substance*.⁹

Whereas in the *Ethics* he writes:

By substance I understand 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. (E, Id3)

In the first case a substance is understood in the traditional way as the subject of an attribute, which is compatible with Descartes' claim that mind and body are distinct substances, but in the later work substance is understood as that the concept of which is entirely independent of anything else. This more restrictive understanding allows Spinoza to conclude that there cannot be more than a single substance since only an all-encompassing substance can be entirely independent of anything else. In view of the presuppositions inherent in definitions the conclusions can never be arrived at with mathematical inevitability, however rigorous the deductions may be. While the conclusions derive logically from the definitions, the definitions derive anticipatorily from the conclusions to be reached. This is not to say that Spinoza begs the question but that, as with all philosophy, our intuitions of the nature of the whole and the nature of the parts mutually inform each other.

There is an obvious difference between Spinoza and Shankara insofar as Spinoza's God is conceived rationalistically and Shankara's is conceived in terms of Hinduism, but in this they may simply be using the modes of expression available to them. If we focus on the experiences that their words point to, rather than the terminology itself, we can see how the formulations may be related perspectively as different expressions of what may be a comparable underlying conception.

II. God

The most evident convergence between Spinoza and Shankara is in their monism. Spinoza's conclusion, "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God" (E, Ip15), is based on

⁹ Baruch Spinoza, *The Principles of Descartes' Philosophy*, (tr.) H. H. Britan (Chicago: Open Court, 1905), Part I, definition 5.

his preliminary definition of God as “a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expressed an eternal and infinite essence” (E, Id6); the infinite leaves no room for anything else.¹⁰ For Shankara too there exists only God, whose inner nature is an absolute unity that can never be fully comprehended by us.¹¹ In both cases the intrinsic nature of God is an absolute unity, but perceived by us as a multiplicity because of our cognitive limitations. How then are these limitations conceived?

III. Knowledge

For Spinoza the most common species of knowledge is also the least adequate, namely imagination, which is made up of individual sense perceptions and memories that are “mutilated, confused, and without order.” Imagination is the mind’s capacity to form images, which are “the affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us.” (E, IIp17s) When our body is affected by another body our mind forms an image of that other mode (i.e., individual), which it regards as present until some other idea arises in the mind that excludes the presence of that mode.¹² Our

¹⁰ This conception is so far from what is usually meant by theism that Spinoza is sometimes regarded as an atheist in disguise. Even in Lurianic Kabbalah God as the Infinite (*En Sof*) creates the world by contracting himself to make room for it. If, by contrast, God is defined so broadly as to be indistinguishable from the sum total of all things, an affirmation of the existence of Spinoza’s God would be equivalent to a denial of the traditional God. When Spinoza asserts in the *Ethics* (Ip11) that God exists, this amounts to no more than the assertion that an all-inclusive substance exists. For a discussion of alternative views, see Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics*, 73–83.

¹¹ *Vedānta-Sūtras* commentary, Adhyāya I, Pāda 1.4, quoted from *Vedānta-Sūtras, with the Commentary by Sankarācārya* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1904), here 23. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as VSC followed by Adhyāya and Pāda and then page number separated by a slash. Cf. *Vivekachudamani* §469. I quote from the translation of Swami Madhavananda occasionally slightly modified (Kolkatta: Advaita Ashram, n.d.) [<http://www.celestel.org/adisankara.html>]. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as VC followed by section number. Although the *Vivekachudamani* may, as some scholars have argued, be the product of Shankara’s disciples, it is largely consistent with better attested works and has the advantage of bringing the full range of his doctrines together in a uniquely concise way.

¹² Error occurs when the mind happens “to lack an idea which excludes the existence of those things which it imagines.” (E, IIp17s) For example, we may think people are still nearby because we did not notice them leave. “Falsity

knowledge of external bodies can never be adequate because adequate knowledge of an individual mode involves knowledge of the mode which was the cause of that mode, which in turn involves knowledge of the mode that was the cause of the latter, *ad infinitum*. (E, IIp9, IIp25) So the occasion for error is part of a more general situation: since the ideas of the affections of the body are *in infinitum* rather than adequate they can never be clear and distinct but only be confused. (E, IIp28) By contrast the second species, rational knowledge, comprises not individual perceptions but “common notions and adequate ideas of the properties of things”—the kind of reasoning with which the *Ethics* is composed.¹³ Rational knowledge sees regularity in multiplicity where imagination sees only diversity.

The third species, intuitive knowledge, takes the next step, from seeing regularities and commonalities to seeing the essence of things with immediacy. It “proceeds from an adequate idea of the *formal* essence of certain attributes of God to the adequate knowledge of the essence of *things*.” (E, IIp40s2; my emphasis) In Spinoza’s example, given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, there are two ways (three, if we count the rote learning of rules by imagination) to find a fourth which is to the third as the second is to the first. Rational knowledge would apply the common property of proportionals demonstrated in Euclid VII.19, but intuitive knowledge immediately sees the fourth proportional number is 6: “we see this much more clearly because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have to the second.” (E, IIp40s2) The operative phrase is “in one glance” (*uno intuitu*): intuitive knowledge is the immediate perception of how things fit together. In the mathematical example it is the common proportionality; in the case of reality as a whole it is to see all individuals as modes of God—the *natura naturans* (“nature naturing,” nature as unitary substance) of *natura naturata* (“nature natures,” nature as the multiplicity of things produced). The desire for the third kind of knowledge can arise from the second kind (reason) but not from the first (imagination) since clear and

consists in the privation of knowledge which inadequate, or mutilated and confused, ideas involve.” (E, IIp35)

¹³ Examples of common notions would be the attributes of thought and extension, but not transcendentals like “being,” “thing,” and “something,” or universals like “man,” “horse,” and “dog,” which are only indefinite extensions of the products of our imagination. (E, IIp40s1) On the question of whether individuals can be known by the second kind of knowledge see Nadler, *Spinoza’s Ethics*, 178–85.

distinct ideas cannot follow from confused ideas (E, Vp28)¹⁴, so we need first of all to replace imagination as far as possible with reason, the second kind of knowledge which, in turn, may ultimately lead to intuitive knowledge, the rarest species of knowledge, won only with greatest of effort. (E, Vp20s)

Here the difference in formulation between Shankara and Spinoza is especially evident. Where Spinoza uses the language of epistemology, distinguishing among faculties of thinking, Shankara uses the language of ontology, tracing our misperception of reality to the "causal body" that misrepresents the unity of God as a spatial and temporal multiplicity, "superimposing" multiplicity onto unity and creating *maya*.¹⁵ This is also the cause of our own misperception of ourselves as individual substances who act on and perceive other things as separate from ourselves. (VSC, I.I.4/43)¹⁶ The world is thus a kind of illusion, not in the sense that instead of a world there is only nothingness, but rather in the sense that the self-subsistence of individuals is illusory, the same way that there is no intrinsic difference between space inside and outside of a jar.¹⁷ What is illusory is

¹⁴ Nevertheless while we are still at the first stage we can progress in virtue if we rely on "sure maxims of life...[and] apply them constantly to the particular cases frequently encountered," for example that hate should be repaid by love." (E, Vp10s)

¹⁵ See VSC, Introduction and *passim*, and VC, §§189–338 *passim*. His frequent example of mistaking a rope for a snake originates with the founder of Advaita, Gaudapada, whose student Govinda was Shankara's teacher. See George Victor, *Life and Teachings*, 13, 15. I am not claiming that Spinoza lacked an ontology or Shankara an epistemology, but only that their explanatory approaches have a different emphasis.

¹⁶ Cf. VC, §189: "Though immutable, [Atman] becomes the agent and experiencer owing to its superimposition.... This contradiction between them is created by superimposition, and is not something real.... The idea of 'me and mine' in the body, organs, etc., which are the non-Self – this superimposition the wise man must put a stop to, by identifying himself with the Atman."

¹⁷ The metaphor is often used by Shankara, e.g., at VSC, I.III.7/151: "it is denied that the individual soul which, owing to its imagined connexion with the internal organ and other limiting adjuncts, has a separate existence in separate bodies – its division being analogous to the division of universal space into limited spaces such as the spaces within jars and the like – is that which is called the abode of heaven and earth. That same soul, on the other hand, which exists in all bodies, if considered apart from the limiting adjuncts, is nothing else but the highest Self. Just as the spaces within jars, if considered apart from their limiting conditions, are merged in universal space, so the individual soul also is incontestably that which is denoted as the abode of heaven and earth, since it [the soul] cannot really be separate from the highest Self." For additional discussion see George Victor, *Life and Teachings*, 139–42.

not the existence of the world but its appearance of being *saguna*, intrinsically possessed of differentiating attributes, whereas in itself it is *nirguna*, without such attributes. For Spinoza, by contrast, we perceive the unity of *natura naturans* as the diversity of *natura naturata* because of our imagination, the first kind of knowledge. Since the imagination is based on individual perceptions it can never discern their unity, unlike reason which is based on "things which are common to all, and which are equally in the part and the whole." (E, IIP38) Thus imagination necessarily but inadequately perceives the unity of *natura naturans* as the multitude of *natura naturata*.

Despite the substantial differences in their formulations, the two models serve the same function. Shankara's recommendation that we overcome the causal body by recognizing our identity with God, corresponds to Spinoza's recommendation for overcoming our perception of the world as *natura naturata* through intuitive knowledge of our identity with God, as modes of *natura naturans*.

IV. Freedom

Spinoza's compatibilist determinism¹⁸ allows for freedom from affects or passions because when we are guided by reason rather than passion our choices follow from our own nature and are deliberately chosen for what they are, whereas we can never have adequate understanding of passions, which are the effects of what is alien to us.¹⁹ Because of the parallelism between extension and thought, the *idea* of anything that increases the body's power of acting increases the mind's power of thinking, raising us to a higher level of perfection and causing us to be affected by joy. (E, IIIp11&s) This is freedom in the fullest sense, self-determination, but we can attain this freedom only by accepting determinism: since everything happens necessarily (E, Vp6s) and follows from the nature of God (E,

¹⁸ See E, IIP29–33, as well as the Appendix to Book I, and E, IIP48. Since mental and physical events are parallel non-interacting chains of causality (E, IIP6–7), mind and body cannot influence each other, so the traditional view of free will must be false which regards the mind as determining the body action. Rather, all our actions are products of physical causes, and all our thoughts are products of ideal causes: "the decision of the mind and the appetite and the determination of the body...are one and the same thing" conceived under different attributes. (E, IIIp2s)

¹⁹ This freedom is the opposite of the usual sense: "most people apparently believe that they are free to the extent that they are permitted to yield to their lust." (E, Vp41s)

Vp14), the cause of our affects is God rather than the individual modes which are only intermediaries. (E, Vp32) "If we separate emotions, or affects, from the thought of an external cause, and join them to other thoughts, then the love, or hate, toward the external cause is destroyed, as are the vacillations of mind arising from these affects." (E, Vp2) In much the way that the Buddhist doctrine of *anatta* is meant to destroy the power of externals over us by denying their substantiality, Spinoza's claim that they are no more than modes of God aims at the same result. Here too the problem is conceived in epistemological terms, with the imagination as the basis: as long as we act from passions, we inevitably choose lesser goods over greater goods when the lesser goods can be achieved quickly and the greater goods require patience, because the images of what is present or can soon become present have more power than the others. (E, IVp8–10)²⁰ Consequently, if a free person is one who acts on the basis of adequate knowledge (reason) and thus "complies with no one's wishes but his own, and does only those things he knows to be the most important," then the person who acts instead on the basis of affects is a slave and, "whether he will or not, does those things he is most ignorant of." (E, IVp66s)

On this issue Shankara takes his terminology from the traditional metaphysical system of Samkhya²¹, which here too gives an ontological rather than epistemological explanation. Like Spinoza²², Samkhya conceives of the inner person (*purusha*), i.e., God, and outward nature (*prakriti*) as ultimately the same; and as for Spinoza God is *natura naturans* while the universe is *natura naturata*, for Shankara there is a comparable distinction between the all-encompassing unity of God as *purusha* (person) and the multiplicity of the universe as *prakriti* (nature).²³ But Shankara's *prakriti* has an ontological

²⁰ "If we could have adequate knowledge of the duration of things, and determine by reason their times of existing, we would regard future things with the same affect as present ones, and the mind would want the good it conceived as future just as it wants the good it conceives as present. Hence it would necessarily neglect a lesser present good for a greater future one, and what would be good in the present, but the cause of some future ill, it would not want at all.... But we can have only a quite inadequate knowledge of the duration of things." (E, IVp62s)

²¹ In the monistic version of the *Bhagavad-gita* rather than the pluralistic version of Ishvara Krishna.

²² See *Ethics*, Preface to Book IV, as well as IVp4.

²³ *The Bhagavad Gita, with the Commentary of Sri Sankaracharya*, (tr.) A. M. Sastry (Madras: Samata, 1977), XIII.19–21, pp. 255–60. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as BGC followed by chapter and verses and then page

structure that *natura naturata* lacks: as it applies to us it consists of three "bodies"²⁴: the gross body is the visible parts of our body; the subtle body our organs of perception, action, speech, and thought; and the causal body (the cause of our distorted view of the world²⁵) is woven out of the three modes *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—reason, passion, and dullness. *Tamas* has only a privative counterpart in Spinoza: a deficiency of the *conatus* (striving) that is the essence of an individual mode, "by which each thing strives to persevere in its being" (E, IIIp7); in accordance with the original meaning of "virtue" Spinoza identifies the *conatus* with virtue and power. (E, IVd8)²⁶ *Rajas*, in turn, corresponds to Spinoza's concept of *passion*, while *sattva* is comparable to reason in Spinoza, the second kind of knowledge, and like the second kind of knowledge it can become an end in itself instead of pushing us on to the third kind of knowledge: "Sattva binds the Self [*atman*] by attachment to knowledge" (BGC, XIV.6/382–83)—it prevents us from attaining the most complete knowledge by leading us to believe that we already have all the access to truth that we need. For Shankara the ultimate goal is to pass from the conceptual knowledge of *sattva*, which is still at the level of nature (*prakriti*) to the direct experiential knowledge that goes beyond nature to its source and true self, *purusha* ("person"). This seems also to be the ultimate goal of the third kind of knowledge in Spinoza, *scientia intuitiva*, knowing in one glance (*uno intuitu*). Here too a direct immediate experience, knowledge by acquaintance, is contrasted with the conceptual knowledge of rea-

number separated by a slash. See also VSC, I.IV.3/243; MC, II.i.1/II.107; VC, §§131–35.

²⁴ See VSC, I.I.1–12/3–34; VC, §§72–96.

²⁵ *Atma Bodha*, (tr.) S. Chinmayananda (Mumbai: Chinmaya Mission, n.d.), §14 [http://www.geocities.com/advaitavedant/atmabodha.htm]. Henceforth referred to parenthetically in the text as AB followed by section number. Cf. VC, §120.

²⁶ The connection between virtue and power is obscured by the Christian conception of virtue as humility (which is not a virtue for Spinoza, see E, IVp53), but survives in expressions like "by virtue of" ("by the power of"). Insofar as it is related only to the mind *conatus* appears as will; as appetite when related to the mind and body together; and as desire in the consciousness of appetite. Passions that fulfil our will are types of joy, and insofar as they also fulfil our appetite are types of pleasure; while those that frustrate our will or appetite are called sadness or pain respectively. (E, IIIp11s) These distinctions provide Spinoza with the basis for his exhaustive classification of our affects. Love, for example, is "joy with the accompanying idea of an external cause," and hate is "sadness with the accompanying idea of an external cause." (E, IIIp13s)

soning, which is essentially descriptive.²⁷ In Spinoza this kind of knowledge is not confined to knowledge of God, as is the knowledge of *purusha* in Shankara, but it is the species within which the knowledge of God finds its adequate manifestation. (E, 5p27, 5p31s) Here again we find a correspondence between the goals of the two thinkers but a difference in their models. In Shankara's case the model is essentially an ontological one since *prakriti* and *purusha* represent distinct ontological stages. But for Spinoza the ontological difference arises out of an epistemological one: the third kind of knowledge is not limited to a different order of being, like the difference between *prakriti* and *purusha*, but applies to any immediate grasp of the essence of things, including mathematical relations. (E, 2p40s2) The difference between our direct knowledge of God and our indirect rational knowledge of common properties is not in the first instance due to a difference in nature of these objects but in the type of knowledge we make use of, since all three kinds of knowledge can be directed at the same objects, as Spinoza's mathematical example shows. The ontological difference between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*, unlike that between *prakriti* and *purusha*, is arrived at in Spinoza's approach only subsequently to the epistemological division of ways of knowing.

If the models are different in approach—epistemological in one case, ontological in the other—the underlying implications are again the same. For Shankara as for Spinoza, the goal is to use knowledge to overcome our bondage to the passions and achieve freedom: “the mind is the only cause that brings about man's bondage or liberation: when tainted by the effects of *rajas* it leads to bondage, and when pure and divested of *rajas* and *tamas* it conduces to liberation.” (VC, §174)²⁸ As with Spinoza, bondage is due to ignorance which is burned up by knowledge²⁹, and our liberation from it is accompanied by love and joy.³⁰ Spinoza's explanation is epistemological. We are obscured not by an ontological mode like *rajas* and *tamas*, which

²⁷ By comparison with Plato's tripartite soul, *rajas* is the common genus of the two irrational factors that Plato distinguishes (appetite and spiritedness), while *tamas* corresponds not to anything in the soul but to the corporeal element that impedes the soul. For Shankara as for Plato (and Spinoza) *sattva* is the faculty that pursues knowledge dispassionately, although there is a kind of knowledge that is higher still because it replaces conceptual description with immediate acquaintance: with Spinoza's “intuition” and Shankara's *purusha*. Cf. Plato, *Republic*, 533a.

²⁸ Cf. BGC XIV.7–8/383–84.

²⁹ See VSC, I.IV.8/253. Cf. VC, §47.

³⁰ See VSC, I.I.12/65 and I.IV.19/274.

together with *sattva* is constitutive of nature (*prakriti*), but by a confusion in our ideas: “the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone.” (E, IIIp3) Thus “[a]n affect which is a passion ceases to be a passion as soon as we form a clear and distinct idea of it” (E, Vp3); “all the appetites, or desires, are passions only insofar as they arise from inadequate ideas, and are counted as virtues when they are aroused or generated by adequate ideas.” (E, Vp4s) Again, for Spinoza as for Shankara, the final liberation from the passions that results from our recognition that the adequate cause of all things is God, is inseparable from love and joy. (E, Vp27)

V. Immortality

For Shankara, when we attain intuitive knowledge of the divine we become in a sense identical with the divine and immortal.³¹ Spinoza's conclusion is similar: “the third kind of knowledge is possible only insofar as the mind itself is eternal.” (E, Vp31) If mind and body are two aspects of the same thing (E, IIp6–7), it is sometimes wondered how Spinoza can maintain that “The human mind cannot be absolutely destroyed with the body, but something of it remains which is eternal.” (E, Vp23)³² In fact mind and body both are destroyed in the same way and are eternal in the same way. The mind does not survive temporally when the body is destroyed—its eternity is not continuance in time but timelessness as a mode of eternal substance: “what is conceived through God's essence itself...[and which] pertains to the essence of the mind will necessarily be eternal.” (*Ibid.*) The same is true of the body: although the individual body does not survive temporally as a mode of *natura naturata*, it too is conceived through the essence of *natura naturans*—it is a mode of God's timeless extension, the eternal universe—and is in that sense eternal: “in God there is necessarily an idea that expresses the essence of this or that human body, under a species of eternity.”

³¹ Cf. VSC, I.I.4/31; TC, II.i.1/1288; VC, §512. For Shankara, as an *advaitist* or nondualist, *atman* or the universal soul, is identical with Brahman or God.

³² Some readers regard this as a breakdown in Spinoza's reasoning, for example Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1984), 357, 372; Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza's Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 83–86; Smith, *Spinoza's Book of Life*, 174. For sympathetic accounts of Spinoza's position, see Alan Donagan, *Spinoza* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Genevieve Lloyd, *Part of Nature: Self-Knowledge in Spinoza's Ethics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), Chapter 4; Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 261–72; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 256–72.

(E, Vp22; cf. Vp29)³³ In this sense we are all equally immortal but in another sense, both for Spinoza and Shankara, we can achieve something more through the knowledge and love of God. The more one achieves the third kind of knowledge “the more he is *conscious* of himself and of God, that is, the more perfect and blessed he is.” (E, Vp31s; my emphasis) To the extent that our mind is considered under the aspect of eternity its “intellectual love of God is the very love by which God loves himself” and by which he loves us. (E, Vp36&c)³⁴ Although we are all equally eternal in the entirely impersonal sense of being modes of eternal substance, and no one can achieve immortality in the sense of individual temporal survival, our eternity can become a living part of our lives to the extent that our consciousness dwells in what is eternal within us (*natura naturans, purusha/atman*) rather than what is transient and other than ourselves (*natura naturata, prakriti*).³⁵ Aristotle too was an advocate for this possibility even though he was not a monist:

we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and being moral, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us.... This would seem, too, to be each man himself, since it is the authoritative and better part of him. It would be strange, then, if he were to choose not the life of himself but that of something else.³⁶

³³ Cf. Shankara’s argument that in our awareness of the reality of a pot, although insofar as the object of that awareness is the pot it is something transient, insofar as the object of that awareness is the *reality* of the pot it is something intransient, *i.e.*, eternal. (BGC, II.16/35–36)

³⁴ This puts into perspective Spinoza’s previous claim that we cannot strive that God return our love. (E, Vp19) There love was conceived as a passion (E, Vp17), here as a perfection. The distinction is missed by those who, like Lewis Feuer, believe that Spinoza advocates an unrequited love for God. See his *Spinoza and the Rise of Liberalism* (Boston: Beacon Press: 1958), 215–18.

³⁵ This implies more than some readers ascribe to Spinoza’s goal. Smith, for example, describes it as only “a worldly or secular redemption based on the moderation of the passions and leading the one true way of life” (*Spinoza’s Book of Life*, 158).

³⁶ *The Nichomachean Ethics*, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, (ed.) Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), Book X, section 7, 1177b31–1178a5.

VI. Disanalogies

That Spinoza’s affirmation of immortality gave rise to interpretive difficulties which do not arise in Shankara is due this time not to the difference between the languages of epistemology and ontology, but to a difference within the ontologies themselves. For Spinoza the distinction between thought and extension is not, like the difference between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata*, a consequence of our imagination (or in Shankara’s case the causal body), but they are intrinsically different attributes of God (E, IIp1–3), as our minds and bodies are these attributes at the level of individual modes (E, IId1, IIp11), and since attributes are simply aspects of God’s essence (E, Ip16) our mind and body are only different aspects of our modality and have no causal connection with one another. (E, IIp6) There is nothing comparable in Shankara. Where for Spinoza mind cannot affect or be affected by body even at the level of *natura naturata*, for Shankara soul is conceived as an independent reality that can move and be affected by body, at least in the *maya* world of superimposition. In Shankara there is nothing like Spinoza’s conception of mind and body as modes of non-interacting parallel attributes of thought and extension, although he does not disagree in principle with Spinoza’s claim that our mind is merely a mode of God’s thinking nature. Conversely, since there is no concept of soul in Spinoza, there is also no concept of the reincarnation so often referred to by Shankara. But this difference too is not as definitive as it appears: even for Shankara individual souls belong to the illusoriness of *prakriti*: “Brahman appears to be a ‘Jiva’ [individual soul] because of ignorance.... The ego-centric-individuality is destroyed when the real nature of the ‘Jiva’ is realised as the Self [*atman*].” (AB, §45)³⁷

Despite the difference between the conceptions of the mind-body relationship in Spinoza and Shankara, there may be a *functional* correspondence between their views in the way both models shield subjectivity from materialistic reductionism. One consequence of Spinoza’s mind-body parallelism is to rule out the Cartesian conception of a soul that acts independently of the body, and this has understandably led readers to interpret Spinoza’s view as materialistic in its implications (this is emphasized by the direction of Spinoza’s explanations, from body to idea rather than from idea to body). But another consequence of the parallelism is to preserve the self-sufficiency of mind from the kind of reductionism by which Hobbes

³⁷ Cf. TC, II.i.1/1.288; VSC, Introduction, 9.

and others (not unlike the Indian materialism of Carvaka) make it merely an attribute of organized bodies. On the reductionist view, at least in its extreme form as eliminative materialism, consciousness and mental events are merely supervenient qualities arising from what happens in the body, and have no intrinsic reality. Spinoza's insistence that "as long as things are considered as modes of thought, we must explicate the order of the whole of Nature...through the attribute of Thought alone" (E, 2p7s), implies that eliminative materialism fails to provide an adequate picture of reality. The evenhandedness of Spinoza's denial that either thought or body can influence the other, retains (against the Hobbesians) the integrity of the mind even as it sacrifices (against the Cartesians) the mind's independence. In the Appendix to Part I, Spinoza illustrated a point about teleology with the example of a stone falling from a roof onto someone's head and killing him. If rather than killing its victim the stone merely hurt him, what would be the cause of the pain? The conventional reply, that the pain was caused by impact of the stone, would be ruled out by Spinoza's model of non-interactive parallelism, since it implies that a bodily event is the cause of a mental event. On Spinoza's view the stone falling on someone's head is the cause of damage to that person's body, but that the pain experienced in the victim's mind is caused not by the stone, but by the *idea* of the stone striking the body. The materialist and idealist accounts are present here side by side.³⁸

VII. Conclusion

The conceptual and rhetorical worlds of Spinoza and Shankara are radically different. The abstractness of Spinoza's formulations results not only from the modeling of his approach on geometric demonstration but also from the influence of Descartes' recasting of philosophy from an objective to a subjective footing. Where for Aristotle "first philosophy" was metaphysics and began with investi-

³⁸ The ontological coequality of mind and body is not compromised by the epistemological priority of corporeal explanations (as in the previous example we understood "the idea of the stone" by reference to corporeal stones). On some views Spinoza's dual aspect theory is no more than a smokescreen to conceal his materialism. I do not find this a convincing way of reading Spinoza, although I think such devices were employed by others such as Descartes. See Kenneth Dorter, "Science and Religion in Descartes' *Meditations*," *The Thomist*, vol. 37 (1973): 313-40. For Spinoza it makes sense to argue from the visible to what is not visible.

gation into the ultimate nature of reality, for Descartes first philosophy becomes epistemology and begins with an investigation into the conditions of knowledge. For Spinoza, following Descartes, it is not enough to say that actions are what we do and passions are what are done to us. He must address the epistemological issue of how, given that all our experience is encountered within our consciousness, we can distinguish within our consciousness between what we are the cause of, and what is caused in us by something else. His answer is that in the former case we have adequate, clear and distinct, ideas of what transpired, and in the latter case only confused ideas: "Our mind does certain things and undergoes other things, namely insofar as it has adequate ideas it does certain things, and insofar as it has inadequate ideas it necessarily undergoes other things.... The actions of the mind arise from adequate ideas alone; the passions depend on inadequate ideas alone." (E, IIp1, IIIp3) Thus, actions are ideas that the mind can perceive clearly and distinctly through itself, while passions are ideas that the mind cannot perceive clearly and distinctly through itself. This way of thinking is alien to Shankara, as also to western philosophy before Descartes. Even Spinoza's conception of God as infinite substance is formulated subjectively since the traditional ontological conception of substance is here assimilated to an epistemological one: "By substance I understand 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" (E, Id3); the first conjunct, "what is in itself," represents the traditional view, while the amplification, what "is conceived through itself," is an epistemological re-interpretation of that view.

Not all of the differences between the two thinkers, however, are reducible to the distinction between ontology and epistemology, or are mere forms of expression. In no sense does Shankara share Spinoza's belief that extension and thought are parallel non-interacting realms, nor Spinoza Shankara's belief in reincarnation, even at the level of *natura naturata*. In the latter case there is no doubt that cultural differences play a part, since Shankara comes from a tradition in which reincarnation is accepted as a matter of course, while for Spinoza the reverse is the case. Thus for Shankara our tendency toward superimposition is a karmic consequence of our past lives³⁹, while for Spinoza it is a consequence of the fact that

³⁹ Cf. VC, §§75, 88, 97, 209, 280. Not only is superimposition the effect of karmic reincarnation, it is also the karmic cause of future reincarnation (§179). Liberation is the breaking of the circle.

our individual mind is the idea of our body and thus looks first to the body and the faculty of imagination.

Moreover for Spinoza, since the attributes are “that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence” (E, Id4), *natura naturans* refers not only to God or substance but to its attributes as well (E, Ip29s), and therefore extension (E, IIp2), whereas for Shankara extension would almost certainly count as part of *maya*. This difference is, however, more verbal than substantive since extension is an attribute of God only under the aspect of eternity, and cannot include any finite extended thing. It is the abstract (timeless) possibility of extended modes. Any particular mode would be a modification of *natura naturata*, which corresponds to Shankara’s mode of *maya*.

Again, Shankara describes the person who attains enlightenment as “thoroughly inebriated with drinking the undiluted elixir of the Bliss of the Atman.” (VC, §551) Spinoza’s intuitive knowledge of God is comparable to what Shankara means by enlightenment, and Spinoza agrees that the experience is bliss (*beatitudo*) (E, Vp42), but it is hard to imagine Spinoza comparing this calm blissfulness with the religious fervour of inebriation (*pace* Novalis’s description of Spinoza as God-intoxicated). In meditative philosophies like Buddhism there is usually a sequence of experiences that the meditator passes through before reaching the highest level, the earlier of them intoxicating, the later sober.⁴⁰ So it is conceivable that Shankara is describing only an early level when he compares it to intoxication, but there is no indication that the state of mind that Spinoza describes in Part 5 is ever experienced as inebriating rather than calmly blissful.

Such rhetorical differences may make us feel as though we are in an altogether different world in each case: in a world of reason and science in one case and in a world of mythology and faith in the other. However, despite the difference in methodology and rhetorical

⁴⁰ “[T]he first meditative state: rapture and pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by thought and evaluation. With the stilling of thought and evaluation, he enters and remains in the second meditative state: rapture and pleasure born of concentration, internal composure and unification of awareness free from thought and evaluation. With the fading of rapture he remains in equanimity, mindful and alert, physically sensitive of pleasure. He enters and remains in the third meditative state. With the abandoning of pleasure and pain — as with the earlier disappearance of elation and displeasure — he enters and remains in the fourth meditative state: purity of equanimity and mindfulness, neither pleasure nor pain” (*Maggasamyutta* 1.8, in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A translation of the Samyutta Nikaya*, [tr.] B. Bodhi [Boston: Wisdom Publications 2000], 1528–29).

tone between Spinoza’s immersion in the scientific and logical culture of the European Enlightenment, and Shankara’s in the Vedantic tradition of classical India, their views have an underlying affinity. For both reality has a double aspect, on one hand as a collection of apparently self-subsistent individuals (*natura naturata* or *maya*) and on the other hand as a single substance within which all individuality is merely a transient feature (*natura naturans* or *atman*). The latter is the former perceived adequately. For both, again, the passions impede our liberation from the inadequate view of reality, and in both cases because of our identification of our self with our individual body rather than with our underlying unity with all things, and our consequent identification of good and bad with pleasure and pain. Thus Spinoza says that we do not desire something because we think it is good, but we think it is good because we desire it. (E, IIIp9s, IIIp39s) The desire is a product of our belief that something is favourable to our body (E, IIIp12), *i.e.*, for ourselves conceived as members of *natura naturata*, a collection of competing individuals. And Shankara writes,

we indeed observe that a person who imagines the body, and so on, to constitute the Self, is subject to fear and pain, but we have no right to assume that the same person after having...comprehended Brahman to be the Self, and thus having got over his former imaginings, will still in the same manner be subject to pain and fear whose cause is wrong knowledge. (VSC, I.I.4/41)⁴¹

For both there is also another sense of goodness that is not simply relative to our desires, whereby we *do* desire something because it is good, rather than calling it good because we desire it—namely what Spinoza calls “a desire which arises from a true knowledge of good and evil” (E, IVp15–17), so that it turns out that pain may sometimes be good, and pleasure or joy sometimes evil. (E, IVp43) To the extent that we can overcome the standpoint of the individual body (*natura naturata*) in favour of intuitive knowledge that sees the whole “in a single glance” (*natura naturans*) this second sense of goodness appears that is non-competitive: “Knowledge of God is the mind’s greatest good.” (E, IVp28) When we act from passions we are

⁴¹ Cf. VC, §§544–45: “Neither pleasure nor pain, nor good nor evil, ever touches this knower of Brahman, who always lives without the body-idea. Pleasure or pain, or good or evil, affects only him who has connections with the gross body etc., and identifies himself with these.”

in competition for the same external things (E, IVp32–34), but when we act from reason we are acting in accordance with the common nature of all: “The greatest good of those who seek virtue is common to all, and can be enjoyed by all equally.” (E, IVp36) To put it differently, in order for us to live by reason, it is desirable that our fellow human beings also live by reason, so “we necessarily strive to bring it about that men live according to the guidance of reason,” which is the true meaning of morality. (E, IVp37&s1) Therefore our treatment of others, even those who injure us, will be motivated by love rather than hate. (E, IVp46) “Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living, and preserving our being (these three signify the same thing) by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one’s own advantage” (E, IVp24), and the only thing that reason regards as in its advantage is what leads to understanding. (E, IVp26) Thus, “We know nothing to be certainly good or evil, except what really leads to understanding or what can prevent us from understanding” (E, IVp27), and the knowledge that achieves this to the greatest extent is knowledge of God, infinite substance. (E, IVp28) To achieve this is to achieve what Spinoza calls self-esteem (*aquiescentia*). (E, IVp52)

This non-relative sense of goodness is evident in Shankara as well: “The ignorance characterised by the notions ‘I’ and ‘Mine’ is destroyed by the knowledge produced by the realisation of the true nature of the Self.” (AB §46)⁴² If we can eliminate superimposition and discover our true self that is eternal and unchanging within, we will recognize—like those who attain intuitive knowledge of God in Spinoza and recognize that their substantial nature is identical with God—that although “the individuality in us delusorily thinks he is himself the seer and the knower... [T]he oneness of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul...has to be realised.” (AB, §26, 30) Both thinkers agree that the only way to achieve this is to overcome the hold on us of the passions, since the importance that we attach to them is an affirmation of the primacy of our bodily existence and comfort. Thus for Spinoza the strategy was to replace our inadequate ideas (passions) with adequate ideas (action, reason), and for Shankara it was to overcome passion (*rajas*) and dullness (*tamas*) with reason (*sattva*).

How does the world appear to us if we reach the goal of liberation? For Spinoza, since the dichotomy is essentially an epistemological one, having intuitive knowledge of God and experiencing the

world as *natura naturans* seems to be no obstacle to our perceiving the world at other times as *natura naturata*, as long as we can do so dispassionately. For Shankara, because the distinction is ontological rather than epistemological the relation between the two realms is presented more radically: the individuality of *prakriti* ceases to exist when we overcome the delusion: “Where is the universe gone, by whom is it removed, and where is it merged? It was just now seen by me, and has it ceased to exist? It is passing strange!” (VC, §483) But this cannot be a permanent condition even for Shankara or we would not have his writings.

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⁴² Cf. AB, §59 and *Upadesha Sahasri* (tr.) S. Jagadananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math., n.d.), §§10–18 [<http://www.celextel.org/adisankara.html>].