

individual identity in spinoza

françois zourabichvili, translated by gil morejón

Spinoza does not himself talk about individual identity, but the expression would not seem out of place in his thought, given that he conceives the individual and its becoming in relation to an *essence*, which is defined as singular.¹ Besides: the understanding (or misunderstanding) of the self, individual difference, the recognition of another individual—these are all Spinozist themes that refer back to identity. The question is of knowing what kind of identity is at stake.

The following is just a sketch of an answer to that question. It aims only to indicate the two conditions of the problem: temperament and species.

1. TEMPERAMENT AND THE QUESTION OF HEALTH

Even if Spinoza never treated it for itself, the question of individual singularity haunts the whole of his work, situated at the crossroads of the two most general problems that it poses: illusion and discord. One might initially be tempted to say that Spinoza is suspicious of individual singularity: he denounces its cult, and endeavors to understand the passion that leads nearly everyone to judge everything in terms of criteria that are worthless because they are tied to one's own singularity—to universalize their own judgment and seek to impose it upon others. Moreover, this would hardly be surprising for a thought that makes salvation depend on a conquest of the universal. Nevertheless this is a simplification, since invok-

ing this kind of suspicion neglects two things: an essence, for Spinoza, is always singular (there is no essence of Man in general, but rather each individual has an essence that differs from that of others); and salvation is an affair that is not only singular, in the sense that each individual must live it for themselves, but also in that it places the individual in a relation with their own singularity.

Spinoza designates individual singularity with the word *ingenium*, and almost always in the same context: that of the ignorant mob (*vulgus*), which is ‘varied and inconstant.’ At first glance, the word thus seems tied to passivity. Spinoza repeats over and over that human beings diverge insofar as they are victims of the passions, and would converge if reason were to gain the upper hand. He opposes two ways in which life is determined: *ex suo ingenio* (conforming to one’s own character or temperament), and *ex ductu rationis* (under the guidance of reason). It seems that Spinoza invites each person to overcome their singularity. This is true, but only partially; or rather, it is only one aspect of the problem. For Spinoza, singularity and universality do not map onto the couplet passive–active.

Ingenium refers to two distinct levels: physical constitution on the one hand, and character or dominant affective tonality on the other. Now, if character always refers back to physical constitution, the reverse is not necessarily true: a character, at least in principle, is for Spinoza neither essential nor definitive. The singularity of the *ingenium* is based on that of the body: *temperamentum, fabrica, constitutio*.² The contemporary French term *tempérament* does not preserve the initial sense of the word *temperamentum*: it is a properly individual mixture, combination, or chemism (‘idiosyncrasy’). But also a proportion: recall that Spinoza defines the individuality of a body in terms of a certain proportion (*ratio*) of motion and rest, of the speed and slowness of its parts. ‘Temperament’ is a physiological notion, or, more precisely, the notion that highlights the physiological anchorage of affectivity. Consider two texts as evidence. On the *constitutio corporis*: “We find by experience that fevers and other corporeal changes are causes of madness, and that those whose blood is thick imagine nothing but quarrels, troubles, killings, and things like these” (*Ep.* 17, to Balling). On the *temperamentum corporis*: “revelation varied according to temperament in this way: if the Prophet was cheerful, what was revealed to him were victories, peace, and the things which move men to joy; for such men usually imagine these things more frequently. On the other hand, if the Prophet was sad, wars, punishments, and all kinds of evil were revealed to him. And as the Prophet was compassionate, calm, prone to anger, severe, etc., he was more ready for one kind of revelation than another” (*TTP* II, 13). The always-

singular constitution of the body implies a certain dominant affective tonality or temperament.

It so happens that *temperamentum* has an even more strictly physiological sense: “Beauty, Sir, is not so much a quality of the object one sees as an effect of the object on him who sees it. If our eye was longer or shorter, or our constitution was different [*nostrum aliter se haberet temperamentum*], the things we now consider beautiful would seem ugly, and those which are now ugly would seem beautiful to us. The most beautiful hand, seen through a microscope, will look terrible. Some things, seen from a distance, are beautiful; when we see them close up, they are ugly. Moreover, things considered in themselves, or in relation to God, are neither beautiful nor ugly” (*Ep.* 54, to Boxel). Here, temperament is the capacity relative to an organ, which aesthetic sensation depends on. No doubt the organ is not itself the subject of satisfaction: the latter is rather the individual as a whole; but the satisfaction is tied to a capacity, to the relation that the organ maintains with certain objects by virtue of its capacity. The text does not explain this satisfaction, but is content to mark the correlation; it renders affective difference immanent to perception, but it still leaves them indifferent to one another.

Another text goes farther. “For example, if the motion the nerves receive from objects presented through the eyes is conducive to health, the objects by which it is caused are called beautiful; those which cause a contrary motion are called ugly. Those which move the sense through the nose, they call pleasant-smelling or stinking; through the tongue, sweet or bitter, tasty or tasteless; through touch, hard or soft, rough or smooth, etc.; and finally, those which move the ears are said to produce noise, sound or harmony. Men have been so mad as to believe that God is pleased by harmony” (*E I*, Ap.). Here, Spinoza explicitly connects aesthetic sensation and judgment to a satisfaction of a physiological order, to such an extent that the sensation produced in the body is not merely of the order of pleasure—which is not even mentioned here—but of the order of health. Aesthetic sensation has no epistemological value: it teaches us nothing of the object, and even fosters illusions by inclining us to treat beauty as a quality of the object; it does however have a medical value, and it might be the case that Spinoza’s medical inspiration has for too long been ignored. What is art? A medication, an excitation of salutary motions in the body: striking the eye or the optic nerve such that it increases its power to act, or that of the body overall.

What then is health? Since strictly speaking individuality is defined by a relation of motion and rest or of speed and slowness between its parts, health is the state in which this relation is not under threat: there is illness when this relation is threatened, or when the latter tends to change under the influence of an external cause. (E IV, P39Pr and P39S) But Spinoza demands of the body more than a simple preservation, or at least what he means by preservation is something other than simply maintaining existence. True health is *hilaritas*, enthusiasm, gaiety, “a Joy which, insofar as it is related to the Body, consists in this, that all parts of the Body are equally affected. I.e., the Body’s power of acting is increased or aided, so that all of its parts maintain the same proportion of motion and rest to one another” (E IV, P42Pr). The preservation of this relation is tied to the *activity* of the body, in the conceptual sense that Spinoza gives this term: a maximal development of affects and capacities; a body is active when “the whole Body may be equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature” (E IV, P45S).³ Affect here is nothing other than an effect: to be capable to do or to act is a joy, and a body all of whose parts can do what they are capable of, or in other words can function in conformity with their structure, can be said to be in good health. (Inversely, pain is the affect that a part of the body experiences when, blocked, dominated by an external cause, it cannot carry out its function or ‘do its job’; pain is the way in which a body experiences the passion suffered by one of its parts.) Spinoza connects two things: the preservation of the relation, and maximal capacity. The body as a whole attains its maximal capacity when its parts communicate a favorable motion, according to the relation that suits them. A given part of the body, taken as a whole, is healthy, or attains its maximal capacity, when it is animated by a motion that affects its parts without changing their relation: some agitations of the optic nerve suit the structure of the eye, others do not (and the same goes for the ear). Aesthetic difference has no other origin. However, it is established between emotions, between affections: there must be something more, the link between capacity and affect.

In fact, it is impossible to separate capacity and affect. Health is defined in relation to this notion in a double sense: it is the full capacity of the body; and its full capacity is not just the source of joy, it *is* joy as such. One must imagine the cheerful eye while it is seeing, the cheerful ear while it is hearing; that is, hearing is a joy, for it is an affect that follows from the nature of our body. Even the arm, when it strikes a blow in anger, is cheerful: for “the act of beating, insofar as it is considered physically, and insofar as we attend only to the fact that the man raises his arm, closes his fist, and moves his whole arm forcefully up and down, is

a virtue, which is conceived from the structure of the human Body” (E IV, P59S). No body produces an effect without itself being affected: sensibility is a property of power, not a faculty peculiar to organisms. And our ‘senses’ are just sensitive faculties among others: walking and striking are also senses in just the same way, even if they perceive nothing. The genesis of affect, in Spinoza, lies in being able and not being able to do in relation to a given nature, or capacity. We only enjoy capacities; and the capacity itself—action—is joy (melancholy being the state of impotence or the maximal incapacity of the body). To modern readers, the Spinozist concept of health, along with the medicine that follows from it, might seem strangely psychosomatic. Spinoza writes this incredible sentence in defense of pleasure: “For why is it more proper to relieve our hunger and thirst than to rid ourselves of melancholy?” (E IV, P45S). But it is clear that such a rapprochement poses the question poorly, and amounts to a misunderstanding: it does not take into consideration the primarily physiological status of affect; the latter is not related to a particular attribute (thought rather than extension) but to power, and therefore bears on any attribute whatsoever. That there is then a correspondence between the affects of the body and those of the mind is another matter, and suffices to ruin any rapprochement with the psychosomatic idea.

The word *temperamentum*, despite its variable usage, finds its coherence in the fact that Spinoza does not envision the body separately from its affects. Anatomy doesn’t interest him much: what he considers in a corporeal ‘part’ (arm, eye, etc.) is its *capacity*, or in other words the effects—or affects—that it can produce. Spinoza is resolutely a physiologist: studying the structure (*fabrica*) of the human body means nothing other than ‘explaining all its functions,’ that is, writing up an exhaustive list of *what it can do*. (E III, P2S) It is likely that the static and contemplative study of the form or configuration of the parts of the body, and so of their organization, would seem to him to foster teleology, recourse to ideas of order and harmony, and the kind of explanation in which the human body “is constituted in such a way that one part does not injure another” (E I, Ap.). Anatomy sings the glory of God, the glory of a supernatural God. Instead, what counts is the temperament of a body: what it can do by virtue of its structure, and the particular affectivity that follows from this. It is clear how this physiological, that is, operational or experimental, conception of the body makes it possible to consider it in its singularity: whereas anatomy, concerned with form or structural disposition, naturally privileges analogy and leads to specific conclusions, functional study necessarily bears on a single body, must be undertaken again for a different one, and again for a different one, and so on to infinity. Anatomy thinks the identity of

an ideal schema and pronounces on individual deviations; physiology in Spinoza's sense experiments on singular bodies, and pronounces on the species in relation to them (resemblances and agreements). Later we will see how species poses a problem for a philosophy of the concrete or singular body; the same difference in approach is found on the moral plane, when Spinoza denounces the mania for comparing and of constructing models (for example in the Preface to *Ethics* IV and in Letter 19 to Blijenbergh; in this regard, ethics is inseparable from medicine, which is practical *par excellence*).

The problematic of health singles out a crucial point: nutrition, the condition for preservation. (*E* II, Post. 4 after P13) But Spinoza proposes here a very singular conception. The nutrient is above all a source of pleasure, and 'contributes to the health' of the body by procuring a pleasure for it. Nutrition is not limited to drinking and eating; it is also the use of "scents, with the beauty of green plants, with decoration, music, sports, the theater, and other things of this kind" (*E* IV, P45S), that is, whatever stimulates *all* the parts of the body, without any disequilibrium favoring or disfavoring any part in particular. The benefit—medically speaking—is not separate from the pleasure; conversely, there is no pleasure that, as such, is not tied to health. Pleasure in itself is not misleading; it is only dangerous, according to Spinoza, when it is too closely tied to one part of the body, thereby provoking a disequilibrium to the detriment of the other parts, threatening the individuating relation; such is the case for sexuality, which is inevitably excessive, exclusive, and obsessional. The virtue of a medication is measured, in the last analysis, by the joy it brings to a part of the body, to the capacity it recovers: it too is a nutrient, which is more favorable than others under certain circumstances. Finally, art is a way for the body to be nourished, and so amounts to a dietetics. Music, for example, is a type of nutrient whose value depends on the constitution of a given body: "Music is good for one who is Melancholy, bad for one who is mourning, and neither good nor bad to one who is deaf" (*E* IV, Pref). Ultimately, what is being nourished, if not being filled with joyous affections that increase the body's power to act? Spinoza says this literally with regard to edible nutrients: *frui, nempe comedere*, "to enjoy it—i.e., to consume it" (*E* III, P59S).⁴ The body's need for nutrition, its need to 'regenerate itself,' remains an empirical postulate, external to the Spinozist logic, so long as one thinks of it as mere consumption, an extra-affective process; however, nutrition must be understood as the necessity of being favorably affected: the body needs joyous affections that maintain or increase its power to act.

Now the attribute of extension has the following particularity: any affect, even if it is active, implies an external body. Unlike the mind, the body is always exerted over *another* body. Even the least capacity mobilizes external bodies: walking, striking, but also seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting. So that the body in action is endlessly nutritive, the problem being only to find the best possible nutrients. The problem of the activity of the body is thus posed differently from that of the mind (this point is essential for the question concerning us here): there is no spiritual nourishment, the mind does not have encounters. Even a medication is only efficacious by its *taste*, because it favorably affects a given part of the body, and the doctor must have no goal, nor any methodological principle, other than the *hilaritas* of their patient: providing the body its joys, the set of partial and microscopic joys that constitute *hilaritas* (Spinoza emphasizes the loss of taste that accompanies sickness). (*E* IV, P63C, P63Pr, and P63S)

Nutrition raises yet another difficulty. Since a body is a part of nature, and thus in perpetual interaction with a number of other bodies, its degree of activity—its relative independence in its encounters—is paradoxically conditioned by its encounters: nutrition is a *need*. There is no question in Spinoza of protecting oneself from encounters, even unexpected ones, but of being active in the encounter, of producing in other bodies effects that are explained by our own nature, and of being correlatively affected with joy, rather than of suffering in our bodies effects that are not explained by our nature. From this point of view, nutrition is tricky. Nutritive enjoyment—in the broad sense that we have defined it—depends on other bodies, and yet the body needs it. In the last analysis, curiously, the activity of the body depends on its passivity, as if action did not contribute to health, but was only its expression. The body needs to enjoy passively, not just a little bit but “as far as possible” (*E* IV, P45S),⁵ provided that the enjoyment is distributed equally across all the parts of the body. Passive enjoyment maintains or develops the body’s capacity, that is, its power to act. (*Ibid.*) Better yet, certain parts of the body seem passive by vocation, if it is true that perceiving through the senses is nothing other than a form of nutrition. But, to follow Spinoza’s examples, the stomach also involves a special sensibility, just like the genital organs: the more parts of the body, the more erogenous zones, it would seem (genital organs having no special privilege in this regard). But doesn’t the question of passivity go the other way around, to the extent that seeing is the very capacity of an organ, and not the nutrition that maintains it? The ear is active when it hears, since hearing is its capacity, its function, its essence; consequently, music is properly auditory physiology, at the same time as it is its dietetic, since it is music that explores what

the ear can do. It is regrettable that Spinoza did not pursue this line of thought, especially since it provides the only way to resolve the apparent anomaly according to which the activity of the body depends on its passivity, a simply *postulated* anomaly (*E* II, Post. 4 after P13): sensing, as a first capacity, as a first form of activity, in a common genesis of action and passion ...

What matters is the difference that emerges between the body and the mind, a decisive difference for the question of individual singularity. In fact: 1. Becoming active, for the mind, means being liberated from the imagination, becoming capable of judgments that no longer depend on the singularity of the corresponding body (judging *ex ductu rationis* instead of *ex suo ingenio*); 2. The mind does not become active without the body, for its part, becoming active as well; 3. For the body, increasing its power means finding appropriate nutrition given its singularity. Spinoza defines the two practices that work toward the *activation* of the individual: Logic and Medicine. (*E* V, Pref) But Logic has for its object the universal, whereas Medicine—which Spinoza could have called Dietetics—is the experimental study of a singular case. In one sense, wisdom is impersonal, since the mind is liberated from the singular determinations of the body of which it is the idea; but on the other hand and simultaneously, it implies that it *learns about* its object—the body—instead of perceiving it confusedly, that it manages to grasp it in its singularity, whereas before it had only poorly distinguished it from other bodies in the idea that it had—that it *was*. Is it by chance that such a duality also plays a role in the theory of knowledge, in the second and third kinds? The mind must accede to reason: second kind, knowledge of common notions. The body must be distinguished: third kind, knowledge of singular essences (it even seems that the body—and medicine—plays a special role in this regard). Oddly enough, then, though not on the same plane, the mind that is liberated is turned away from the body, and at the same time is turned toward the body.

The same body becomes active without changing its tastes nor its affective predisposition. What changes is its general humor, its dominant affective tonality: reasonable instead of coarse, joyous rather than sad (even though some temperaments are already happy, as evidenced by the ‘cheerful,’ healthy prophet.) (*TTP* II, 13) This is what Spinoza, in the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, calls ‘temperament.’ At least one thing is clear: becoming-active modifies one’s temperament. Thus one’s system of tastes, which is invariable since it is based on one’s corporeal structure, is disarticulated from one’s dominant affective tonality: the word ‘temperament’ turns out to be equivocal. On the other hand, life no longer unfolds *ex suo ingenio*

but rather *ex ducto rationis*. One must not think that the system of tastes is pushed aside, or that it changes, or that the individual can become indifferent toward it, as though they were freed somehow from their singularity. Activity is always that of a singular body. What changes is that the individual now better understands their system of tastes, and more easily guards against disagreeable encounters that provoke excessive affective reactions and reduce reasoned judgment to impotence ('to see the better and do the worse'): *Caute!* Prudence! Knowing better, then, their own 'temperament,' in the sense of the Letter to Boxel and the Appendix to the First Part of the *Ethics* combined (i.e., knowing better their system of tastes, deriving from the structure of the body), the individual procures for its body a favorable milieu, so that their power to act increases. The *ingenium*, in the sense of one's own proper genius, does not change but on the contrary is expressed; and yet the *ingenium*, in the sense of one's comportment, changes and becomes that of a free human being. (*E* IV, P66S and IV Ap. IX) What seems strange is that the individual no longer lives *ex suo ingenio*, to the extent that their *ingenium*, having become universal, no longer tends to differ from that of other free human beings: nothing personal remains in this conquered *ingenium*, in which, paradoxically, singularity is better expressed.

How can this paradox be resolved? Its logical articulation is given in the judgment: *by virtue of the singularity of its body, the individual comes to determine itself rationally*. Singularity is the problematic horizon of the judgment; reason is its mode of determination. 'Rationally' primarily means: understanding true utility, which is to enter into community with other human beings, and consequently to pursue shareable, rather than exclusive, goals. Singularity only blossoms in community. This is no dialectic: singularity lacks nothing, does not bear any negativity in itself; but it is, in its existence and insofar as it is a part of Nature, inseparable from an environing milieu, which is more or less favorable, and the most favorable milieu is the community of similars (which are not, for all that, identical). We have to understand *why* the individual's becoming-active takes place through common goals, a point that will become clearer when we take up the relation of the individual and the species; for now, it is sufficient to know that the individual, when they conduct themselves *ex ductu rationis*, do not thereby give up their singular interests (whence, on the political plane, Spinoza's difference from Hobbes: Spinoza *always* maintains natural right [*Ep.* 50 to Jelles]⁶). Individualism, for Spinoza, is only a very confused manner of expressing one's singularity.

The expression *ex suo ingenio*,⁷ even when it is a matter of life, is thus exclusively related to judgment: it designates the usurpation of the universal, the false pretension to objectivity of judgments that only reflect the state of a body, the relation of a body to its existential milieu (in a way, it would be better to say: *ex occursibus*). To live according to reason does not eliminate one's *ingenium*, which remains the very stakes of life, the set of the conditions—which vary from one individual to another—of the problem that constitutes life. To live in a reasonable way amounts to nothing more nor less than to know one's *ingenium*. The problem of health thereby plays a pivotal role in the question of individual identity, at once because it localizes singularity (at the level of the capacities of a body) and because it lets us know that it is not intrinsically tied to passivity.

The problematic of the individual thus puts before us:

1. An opposition between two modes of singularization: one passive, one active; but more profoundly, one illusory, the other essential;
2. The paradox of activity, a process simultaneously of universalization and of singularization.

How can we bring these different aspects together? The first point has been sketched out above; the second will lead us to reexamine the relation of the individual to the species in Spinoza, that is, the very curious status of essence.

2. ESSENCE AND THE QUESTION OF SPECIES

The status of essence in Spinoza is not immediately clear.⁸ On the one hand, essences are singular and not specific; on the other hand, there is the question of a human nature, of a nature of the human body, of the human mind, etc. To say that it is a matter of common notions is insufficient: we still need to see what they are based on.

What about species?⁹ Species is, if not defined, at least treated in terms of agreement [*convenance*] and capacity to be affected. The difficulty is as follows: there are no specific essences, but species nevertheless has a reality and has something to do with essence. There cannot be specific essences because God produces modes and not species; if the human being in general were produced as a mode, what would be the necessity for this mode to be repeated an infinity of times? The species–individual relation runs aground on the principle of sufficient reason.

And yet, modes are grouped into species, by virtue of an agreement that follows from their essence. Spinoza says ‘agree *by nature*’: the concept of agreement thus unfolds in the register of essence.¹⁰ Grouping modes into species is in no way accidental, it is ontologically grounded—and yet species is not an essence. It is a relational, *a posteriori* concept; species concerns the relations between essences, since the specific grouping presupposes the preliminary recognition of an agreement. Whence the criteria of capacity to be affected: the horse is distinguished from the human being from the point of view of the *libido procreandi*; certain of their libidos agree and are satisfied in similar ways (*gaudium, gaudere*), and others do not and are not. (*E* III, P57S)

But how are these agreements possible, if essences are singular, that is, if they only relate to one another through their difference? Their sole relation is indeed this non-relation, but only insofar as they are included within the attribute (as pure intensive quantities or degrees). For insofar as they are actual,¹¹ their proximity in degree translates into a resemblance in extended figure; inversely, it is logical that bodies that are similar in a certain number of respects enjoy a nearly identical force for maintaining themselves in their state. And if bodies are ‘similar’—that is to say, resembling—then agreement is thinkable: agreement presupposes extension. Proximity in degree is really just a minimal difference, but in no way yet a resemblance: in the intensive order of power, there are only differences that, no matter how small or large, are absolute (it is not possible to conceive of resembling, let alone identical, degrees). In the extensive order of finite existence, by contrast, proximity becomes resemblances, that is to say a combination of similarities and differences, so that difference is relative: a small difference is a difference in some respects, although there are similarities in other respects. This distribution of agreements and disagreements presupposes divisibility, or composition: it remains unthinkable in the domain of the simple (simplicity of degree). Finally, agreements and disagreements imply encounters; for there must be a minimum of agreement in order for there to be encounters (*omnibus communia*).

On the scale of degrees of power, how can we account for agreements and disagreements? An essence is only a degree, it is singular, simple: it is not very clear how it could imply a variety of relations. Sticking to power, the only thinkable affinity is proximity on the scale of degrees. Similar would therefore be *neighbors*, and the limit of the neighborhood would mark the threshold of disagreement. But what would serve as the limit of a neighborhood? There are no discontinuities. One must accept that, rigorously speaking, to infinitely proximate degrees on

the scale, there can and even must correspond resembling bodies; but between two bodies, sometimes disagreement prevails, and sometimes agreement does. If we are able to understand that to two very proximate degrees there correspond bodies of which one, which is superior, is indifferent to the other, which is inferior, and which is truly *disagreeable* to it—on the other hand, however, this play of agreement and disagreement presupposes discontinuities or thresholds to which we cannot imagine anything corresponding on the scale of degrees. In fact, given a body, which corresponds to a degree of power, if one ascends or descends the scale of bodies beginning with it, at a certain point disagreement will prevail over agreement (that is, following Spinoza's criteria: the body no longer extracts any *gaudium* from its commerce with other bodies). Empirically, the passage from overall agreement to overall disagreement is brutal (for example, from a human being to a horse), whereas the agreement–disagreement relation can, without thereby reversing its polarity, continuously vary (so that, between human beings: the affinities or repugnances between human beings do not mean that disagreement will prevail over agreement, except in the limit-case of civil war; besides, Spinoza distinguishes between an essential plane, where agreement prevails, and an accidental plane, where disagreement can gain the upper hand). The scale of degrees of power, by contrast, is continuous. Even the vulgar think (*E II, A2*), whereas the most powerful of horses still belongs to the *irrationalia* (*E III, P57S*). Thus one cannot even say that the threshold where the polarity tips over could be found between two successive degrees: however close they are to one another, it is always possible to assign a third degree between them. One must therefore imagine gaps in the scale of degrees of power, not that certain degrees would not exist there and that no essence would correspond to them, which makes no sense (God suffers no lacuna in its power nor in its thought), but in the sense that the scale is not continuous. An infinite series of infinite series. The only hypothesis that remains is to assume there are singularities or thresholds where power bifurcates, passes from one order to another. This hypothesis is necessarily uncertain, but a number of elements appears to justify it.

Let us recapitulate. First, an infinite series of degrees of power; second, this infinite series of degrees of power includes discontinuities: the curve of power passes through thresholds. Each threshold gives rise to a multiplicity of infinitely proximate degrees. We therefore distinguish between two progressions: that of degrees of power, which is continuous; and that of thresholds or levels, which is discontinuous.

In order to put forward this second dimension, we have a clue at our disposal: in his theory of individuation, Spinoza invokes individuals of various levels (composed of simples, composed of composites, composed of composites of composites, etc. all the way up to the *facies totius universi*), which in fact designate levels of individuals: for example, all individuals designated by the name ‘human being’ are on the same level (and yet, all these individuals differ essentially...). Thus it is clear that Spinoza thinks essence according to two dimensions: degree and order. And order is also a series of powers or exponents: if we call a composite C , there will be individuals of type C (composed of simples), C^2 (composites of composites, that is, $C \times C$), then C^3 (composites of composites of composites, $C \times C \times C$), up to C^n —Nature as a whole.

Second clue: the problematic character of the assimilation of mode to a property of an attribute, given that the existence of the mode is individual whereas a property amounts to a kind. The texts by Spinoza that deal with the relation between definition and the number of individuals (which, as it happens, is a non-relation—as we will see) fit poorly with those that affirm the singularity of the essence of an individual (*hujus et illius Corporis humani essentia* [E V, P22]) and those that denounce the abstractions of genus and species. Finally, Spinoza tells us that properties are the object of common notions, which tell us nothing about essences (E II, P37 and P40S2): this is the problem of agreement and disagreement, whose correlate on the plane of power we are looking for.

This correlate is nothing other than the threshold or order, the series of powers or exponents. Reread Proposition 16 from the First Part of the *Ethics*: “From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes” (E I, P16). Even more than the difficulties concerning the number of properties (why many rather than one?) it is the repetition of the word ‘infinite’ here that gives us pause: is this purely redundant, signifying the modal status of the thing? Is there not an echo of this repetition in the definition of striving: *quantum in se est / in suo esse*? And what if it were not a redundancy? And what if there were no way, at the end of the day, to assimilate things and modes, properties and modes?

An infinity of things in an infinity of modes, Proposition 16 tells us—the Latin says, more concisely: *infinita infinitis modis*. *Infinita* is the series of discontinuities of thresholds or levels; *infinitis modis*, the continuous series of degrees. For each thing an infinity of modes, that is, for each order of power ($C, C^2, \dots C^n$) an infinity

of degrees. Spinoza's very expression affirms that a property does not exist outside its modes: a property only follows from the necessity of the divine nature in a certain mode, and not in itself. For Spinoza, then, a property is a theme that does not exist outside its variations. A curious torsion: what follows from the necessity of the divine nature are things rather than modes, and yet God produces modes rather than things (an analogous torsion, though one with a very different meaning, is found in Leibniz: God creates the world rather than the monads, but the world does not exist outside the monads that express it). What is a property? It is—to borrow a concept from Gilles Deleuze, though he does not employ it in this precise context—a *multiplicity* of singular essences, or in other words a plurality without any subsuming unity (a property is not itself an essence, it is only common to an infinity of essences). Properties are not unities, they come in packs: they are multiplicities.

Is Spinoza's assimilation of modes and properties a sure thing? What is it, in the text, that assures us of it? Does not the coherence of Spinozism on the contrary require that we distinguish them? Is there another means of exiting from the dilemma of the individual and the species? A long argument would here be necessary, but we will limit ourselves to a few remarks.

Spinoza never says that modes are properties. He says: 1. That “from the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many [properties, based on the demonstration] in infinitely many modes” (*E I*, 16); 2. That by mode one must understand an affection, that is, “that which is in another through which it is also conceived” (*E I*, D5), modes or affections being nothing other than “particular things” (*E I*, P25C), that is, “whatever exists” (*E I*, P36Pr); 3. Each existing thing “expresses in a certain and determinate way the power of God” (*Ibid.*), or in other words particular things are affections or “modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way” (*E I*, P25C).

Modes are therefore expressions of the attributes. But what is expressed? Is it modifications of substance, each giving rise to a mode (or individual)?¹² Or is it rather properties? Proposition 25 of Part I, to which the cited corollary refers, concerns the essence of “things produced by God”: the essence of things is necessarily inferred from the divine nature. Here one will recognize Proposition 16, which Spinoza mentions. Essences are thus the *infinita*—which would imply, from the point of view of our hypothesis, that all individuals would have the same essence. But we cannot remain there, since the corollary to I, P24 already added another

element concerning essence: it is that through which the individual perseveres in existing, which is an anticipation of III, P7, where striving (*conatus*) to persevere will be defined as the actual essence of the individual. The question is whether it is conceivable that this effort is the same in a plurality of individuals. Here we run up against the principle of sufficient reason: what would be the necessity of a plural production of individuals for a single essence, or of a production of identical essences?

Finally, “from the given essence of each things some things necessarily follow” (*E* III, P7, recalling I, P36): here it is a question of a production of effects, not of properties. Nevertheless these effects do depend on properties of the particular thing, which may be easily assimilated to its faculties. And it is clear, for example in the case of the human being, precisely how the assimilation of property and effect is not self-evident (the reference to *E* I, P16 in the demonstration of I, P36 proves nothing, since modes, or effects, just as much as properties, follow from the nature of God, according to I, P16). A human being has certain properties, which it expresses by producing effects, and not by producing these properties: one does not ‘do’ a given property; rather, one ‘does’ something by virtue of a given property of essence. For example, seeing is a property that follows from the essence of the human body; but seeing as a faculty differs from actual visual perceptions as particular affections. One might object that Spinoza thinks that there is only a distinction of reason between a faculty and the acts that one attributes to it (as for example the intellect and its ideas, the will and its volitions, etc.). But this is precisely what we are trying to say with regard to properties: they are packs, multiplicities, multiplicities of effects of the same species. A property or faculty is a species of effects, which each effect expresses (a given visual perception expresses the property of seeing, which does not exist outside actual visual perceptions). Moreover, Spinoza himself employs infinitives (speaking, walking, reasoning) to speak of properties that the very young infant does not yet possess. And he often speaks of a *virtue* that follows from the structure of the human body.¹³ Finally, the term *proprietas* does not, in the *Ethics*, mean ‘mode.’¹⁴

This reading, which is of course conjectural, must be put into dialogue with two series of texts. First of all, there are those texts concerning the property–number relation (*E* I, P8S2; *Ep.* 34 to Hudde; *Ep.* 50 to Jelles): there, it is a question of the relation of the general to the particular, whereas Proposition 16 concerns the relation between two levels of singularity. Let me explain. In the second scholium to I P8 and in Letter 34, Spinoza says that the definition of a thing—a thing, recall, is

a property, a common notion; when he wants to talk about an individual, Spinoza says ‘*existing* thing’—he says that the definition of a thing is indifferent to number, insofar as their existence is not included in their essence. In this way, to define the concept of the soul is not to define the soul in general (as if all particular souls were identical, essentially speaking, and therefore differed from one another *solo numero*), nor some particular soul (for this would no longer be a concept), but *a* soul, employing the indefinite article (Latin in any case doesn’t have any articles, which doesn’t make the translator’s or the interpreter’s job any easier); or even *souls* [les âmes], on condition that we understand this as a singular collective.¹⁵ A soul, neither particular nor general, is a singularity: it is in this sense that property is indifferent to number. It is in this way that we must distinguish a concrete, essential, ontological plane, where a singular property traverses an infinity of always singular modes; and an abstract plane, that of predication, where singular modes become particulars subsumed under a property that has become general or specific. Sometimes property refers to modes (singulars), sometimes it refers to individuals understood in the numeric sense (individuals); or again, sometimes individuals are the modes of a property, sometimes they are its *exemplars* (a word used in Letter 50).¹⁶ The common notions are not arbitrary like universal notions, but they are no less notions; in other words, they designate not an individual but something common to many individuals: we will see that these common notions, which transform singulars into particulars, are ontologically grounded, even if, concretely, only singulars exist, and not particulars (universal notions, for their part, are by no means grounded, since they depend on affections). (Cf. *E* II, P40S1)

Now let us proceed to the theory of agreement and difference, such as it is expounded in Part IV of the *Ethics*, beginning with Proposition 29. The problem of relations of agreement and difference between individuals can only be posed if they do not differ entirely, that is, if there is a minimum of agreement between them. We are thus in the domain of partial agreements and differences, where everything is a matter of more and less, as evidenced by the thesis according to which the human is the being that best agrees with the human, the being that is most useful for it (formulated in this way, this is a tautology or a *petitio principii*, since the immanent criteria of specific distinction just is maximal agreement). (*E* IV, P35C1) A horse is also useful to the human, it is in agreement with the human on many things, and the forces of the horse and that of the human being can, to a certain extent, be conjugated (in agricultural labor and in war, following the two examples given in the scholium on memory): there is sufficient agreement between the two that one can become the auxiliary of the other. By contrast, a fly

has very little agreement with the human being (even though everything extended agrees at least minimally with the human being). Thus it is a matter of partial agreements and differences. Given this text, what about inter-human relations? For this is above all what is at stake, as the text opens onto the necessity of social life. (E IV, P37S2) The criteria for the distribution of agreements and differences between human beings is very clear: *quatenus passionibus sunt obnoxii* (E IV, P32 and P34) / *quatenus ex ductu rationis vivunt* (E IV, P35). Reason being the essence of the human mind, one is tempted to think that the differences are accidental or extrinsic, whereas the agreements are essential or intrinsic. But this would inevitably be a mistake, since Spinoza says *natura convenire*, but also *natura discrepare*. Differences and agreements are thus equally explained by essence; individual differences refer back to the *ingenium*, as the product of their essence (corporeal constitution) and their encounters.

The concepts of essence and agreement, posed in this way, account for the singularity of the individual *within* the species, by escaping from the brutal alternative of the singular and the specific according to which either only singularity is essential (but then agreement—and the species—become incomprehensible), or else only the species is essential (individuals all participate somehow in the same essence, and singularity becomes unthinkable). So now we can return to the question of individual identity.

As we know, the power to act can gain the upper hand over external causes, in such a way that the individual becomes active. The problems that this passage to activity poses cannot be taken up here; we would in particular have to insist on the asymmetry of the body and mind, which we noted above, since a body never ultimately prevails over external causes. When one asks after the status of individual identity in Spinoza, one finds that, beneath the *ingenium* of any given individual, which only inadequately singularizes it, there is a more profound identity that alone deserves to be called *essence*. Beneath the passive *ingenium*, there is the degree of power on which it depends, and this power can be liberated in existence. The individual's desire is not hopelessly determined to have a natural, congenital, essential character; rather, it can come to testify to a more profound individual identity—to *express* the individual, instead of merely indicating it confusedly.

A question nevertheless arises: are these desires still individual, or individuated? Do they singularize the individual? Do they still affirm a singular identity? Does this not risk dragging Spinoza into an individualism that is foreign to him? Once

again, this would be to confuse individualism of the first kind (passivity) with the double process of singularization and universalization that characterizes the second and third kinds (activity).

Properties necessarily follow from the essence of God, but God produces modes rather than properties: the human is a property effectuated in an infinity of ways, which does not exist outside of this infinity of modes. These modes differ amongst themselves quantitatively, and not qualitatively, according to the degree of power that *is* their essence: individual essence is a *quantum*.¹⁷ The individual expresses a specific property in a certain mode. This modality can only consist in the quantity of striving (actual essence, *quantum in se est*) with which it affirms the specific property that is its own (*in suo esse*). A given human expresses the human property, like all other humans, but only as far as it can. To have such an essence means: I have this amount of force to manifest the property 'human' by my existence. The individual does not have two natures, one singular and the other specific; rather its singular essence is to be able, to a certain extent—*quantum in se est, quantum potest*—to express a specific property, a property of the essence of God, a property of each of the attributes in which it is expressed. In other terms, a threshold of physical and mental complexity. The active individual expresses something absolutely anonymous or impersonal, a transindividual singularity, which is 'specific,' indifferent to the particular and to the general, that it cannot claim as its *own*: a human. All human beings, in this sense, express the same transindividual singularity: identity appears as a point of anonymity, the effects that follow from my singular nature expressing a property that has the name 'human'—whence the communal affect tied to activity. Better still, the greatest striving brings us back to individual singularity, since knowledge of the third kind does not consist in grasping the essence of human bodies in general, but the essence of a given body—my own. (*E V, P22*) It consists in grasping the part of power which is that of my body within Nature, as constituting a part of Nature, with the finitude that follows from it. Is this a kind of schematism, a schematic of the striving that would bridge the gap between essence and its concrete manifestations? Whatever the case may be, individual identity here is no longer the quantity of expression possible for someone anonymous, but the very thing that must be expressed: the degree of power becomes the object, just as much as it becomes subject. Now we are speaking of an identity without singularity (since it is a force expressing the same property as an infinity of other degrees): in knowledge of the third kind, this identity, grasped for itself, appears purely singular, unique in its kind, irreplaceable, unsubstitutable. Not only because it is my own, but also and above all because it is a certain

degree, which can never be repeated anywhere: quantitative singularity. The two aspects of essence are included in the simplicity of the degree, since the latter involves both the property of the human being—it is found in the neighborhood of a certain threshold within the series of power—and a certain capacity to express it. The essence of a human being is not the essence of a given body without being at the same time the essence of a human body. Only then is the property grasped as a multiplicity, as a concept absolutely inseparable from the modes that express it: neither prototype, nor pure nothingness.

Of what order is the identity of an individual for Spinoza?

A first, insufficient, answer, is: *ingenium*, character or ‘temperament’—the consequence of the passive life of a singular body submitted to encounters, the confused expression of a body whose singularity is diluted in an anonymous type. In fact, the majority of individuals never transcend this semi-anonymity, and belong to a mob—the *vulgus*—from which only some types emerge; they have only a confused access to their own singularity (even and especially when they lay claim to it) and to that of others: passive-affective knowledge of oneself and others, the temporality of recognition. True singularity corresponds to the other sense of ‘temperament’—the singular constitution or *structure* of a body, that is, the set of its *capacities*, which is necessarily the object of an apprenticeship, supposing this takes place (becoming active): singular knowledge of oneself and of others, the temporality of experience. In this regard, activity presents itself under a manifest paradox: singularity of health, universality of salvation. The compatibility of these two aspects, to which knowledge of the third kind testifies, seems to us to be based on the immanence of species to individuals, of property to modes: the individual as a singular incarnation of the species.

Individual singularity is thus not character. One’s character has nothing essential, even if, in its passivity, it confusedly reflects something of identity. The notion of character does not reach the individual in its singularity: the character is typical (passivity) or tends toward the universal (wisdom). This is why it is not a matter of combatting one’s *ingenium* but of inflecting it, of transforming it. This change does not take place abstractly, since we are not angels: its condition is a certain body, which is that of which there is an essence. Individual singularity is thus indeed an *identity*, but identity thought in this way loses its traditional attributes: it becomes a pure *quantum*, a degree of power, never given or representable but implied in acts, speech and postures—an object of intuition alone.

When we ask after the relation of the individual and its identity in Spinoza, we must not confuse the *individualism* of the first kind of knowledge with the eminently sociable *becoming-singular* that characterizes the passage from the second to the third kind. The individual's quest—for ambition, for glory—fails in principle, since the individual never escapes *types*, typical designations (they're an ambitious one... that's just a kind of ambition...): however refined one gets about it, one will never reach the singular by means of progressive specifications; singularity is not obtained, it is not a mixture. And so there is a rage of the ambitious, a rage for distinction, that is all the more vivacious and all-consuming the more it obscurely recognizes that it can only lay claim to, at best, a particular conformism. If singularity is not obtained, it is rejoined, by means of an effort exerted on oneself—not, of course, against oneself—which is all the more foreign to narcissistic indulgence as its object is not the individual itself but the specific property that it expresses in a singular mode—human nature. I express not myself but *human being*, which is given nowhere, a pure question to which an infinity of modes constitute answers; but at some point, in Nature, it is *me* that expresses it.

FRANÇOIS ZOURABICHVILI (1965–2006) was a French philosopher specialized in the works of Gilles Deleuze and Baruch Spinoza. He was director of *Collège international de philosophie* (1998–2004).

GIL MOREJÓN is an instructor in the Department of Philosophy at DePaul University in Chicago, where he recently defended his dissertation, *Obscurity and Involvement: On the Unconscious of Thought in Leibniz, Spinoza, and Hume*. He also recently edited and translated (with Filippo Del Lucchese and David Maruzzella) a collection of essays by Alexandre Matheron, *Politics, Ontology and Knowledge in Spinoza*, forthcoming with Edinburgh University Press.

NOTES

1. Zourabichvili delivered this essay as a talk at a conference at the Sorbonne entitled ‘Spinoza: Puissance et ontologie’, organized by the Collège Internationale de Philosophie in May 1993. It was subsequently published as “Identité individuelle chez Spinoza” in *Spinoza: puissance et ontologie*, eds. Myriam Revault D’Allonnes and Hadi Rizk, Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1994.
All English quotations are drawn from Benedict de Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (2 vols.), trans. and ed. Edwin Curley, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985-2016 [CWS]. —*trans.*
2. *Constitutio* designates a state that is sometimes structural (*Ep.* 17 to Balling: having thick blood) and sometimes occasional (*E* III, P59S: having a full stomach).
3. Cf. *E* IV, Ap. XXVII. The definition of activity is found at the beginning of Part III.
4. This passage cites another example of nutrition, making love, in the same terms.
5. One will recognize here the formula of *conatus*.
6. Balibar has shed considerable light on the political stakes of the term *ingenium* in Spinoza. (Cf. Balibar, Étienne, *Spinoza and Politics*, trans. Peter Snowdon, New York: Verso, 2008, 28-31)
7. This expression appears very frequently, especially in the *Political Treatise*. For the *Ethics*, let us refer to just a few appearances: *E* I, Ap.; III, P31S; IV, P37S2.
8. Here one will recall the two most remarkable studies on Spinoza, in this regard as in many others: Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin, New York: Zone Books, 2005, esp. chapters 5 and 12; and Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza II: L’Âme*, Paris: Aubier, 1974, pgs. 459-466 and 547-551.
9. This is rarely discussed in the *Ethics*, but we can still refer to a few appearances: III, P56; IV, Pref; IV, Ap. IX, etc.
10. The notion of agreement has three principal senses in Spinozism. 1. Nominal agreement, for example between the dog as an animal that barks and the dog as a celestial constellation (*E* I, P17S); 2. Agreement of the idea with its object or ideatum (which Alain Badiou has defined as the norm of a *coupling*); 3. Agreement between individuals. In this essay we are concerned with the concept as elaborated in this third sense. [cf. Badiou, Alain, *Briefings on Existence: A Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*, trans. and ed. Norman Madarasz, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006, chapter 5. —*trans.*]
11. In the sense that Spinoza speaks of *essentia actualis* (*E* III, P7 and V, P29 testify to a terminological hesitation).
12. Cf. Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy*, Ch. 6
13. Cf. *E* IV, P59S, on beating as a virtue.
14. Cf., for example, the beginning of the Appendix to Part I of the *Ethics*, regarding the properties of God. Besides, Spinoza says that even though a human body is affected *multis modis* (*E* III, Post. 1), indeed *plurimis modis* (*E* II, Post. 3 after P13), and even though every affect—at least all the passive ones—can assume “infinite degrees and modes” (*E* IV, P43Pr), nevertheless these modes are not to be confused with the properties of affects, whose study is announced at the end of the Preface to Part III..
15. As in the Greek neuter plural.
16. [It is a bit misleading for Zourabichvili to point out that the word *exemplaires* appears in Letter 50. Spinoza writes: “remsummodò existentiae, non verò essentia respectu unam, vel unicum dici: res enim sub numeris, nisi postquam ad commune genus redactae fuerunt, non

concipimus.” (Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. Carl Gebhardt, Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925; IV, 239) Appuhn’s French translation of the latter part of that sentence reads: “Nous ne concevons en effet les choses comme existant en un certain nombre d’exemplaires qu’après les avoir ramenées à un genre commun.” (Benedict de Spinoza, *Oeuvres de Spinoza* [3 vols.]. Trans. Charles Appuhn. Paris: Garnier, 1929) Curley’s translation is more faithful: “For we don’t conceive things under numbers unless they have first been brought under a common genus.” (*Ep.* 50; CWS I, 406) But in this rendering, obviously, there are no ‘exemplars.’ —*trans.*]

17. It is Deleuze who has best illuminated the quantitative character of essence in Spinoza.