

How We Experience the World: Passionate Perception in Descartes and Spinoza

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There is a long scholarly tradition of laying out Spinoza's critique of Descartes, and the alternative Spinoza offers. In a sense the tradition begins with Spinoza himself, who demonstrated his careful reading of Descartes in his *Principles of Descartes's Philosophy*, and offered moments of quite pointed criticism in his *Ethics*. More recently, Daisie Radner and Michael Della Rocca each argue, though in quite different ways, that Spinoza sees problems in the Cartesian account of mental representation and aims to resolve those problems in the alternative account he proposes.¹ In this paper, I follow Radner and Della Rocca, focusing on Descartes's and Spinoza's accounts of mental representation, though I take a somewhat different tack, for I begin by drawing out a point of common ground between Descartes's and Spinoza's accounts of the intentionality of our sensory perceptions: Both Descartes and Spinoza are remarkable in their efforts to incorporate an affective or emotional dimension into sense perception. Nonetheless, despite Spinoza's agreement with Descartes on the affective dimension of sense perception, Spinoza's situation of that affective dimension is importantly different from Descartes's, and that point of difference is tied to a critique of Descartes's account. I conclude the paper with some thoughts about the targets of this Spinozistic critique.

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In order to bring out the distinctive affective dimension of both Descartes's and Spinoza's accounts of the intentionality of our sensory perceptions, it will be helpful to contrast it with an alternative model of the relation between sensation and emotion, one that should be quite familiar. For this reason I will call this alternative model the Familiar Account. The Familiar Account models our experience of the world as at base sense perception and conceives these sensations as states that seem to tell us about

¹ Radner, "Spinoza's Theory of Ideas" and Della Rocca, "The Power of an Idea." See also Della Rocca, *Representation*, though there he is concerned more to develop an interpretation of Spinoza than to situate Spinoza relative to Descartes.

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properties of things in the world. Accounts of mental representation on this familiar model aim to explain how they do that, and further how these appearances can afford us knowledge, though my concern will be solely with the first part of the account, the explanation of the intentionality or content of the sensation. On the Familiar Account, our experience of the world can become richer and more textured insofar as the information represented in these sensations gets taken up in our cognitive economy. We can feel emotions about the things we see, hear, touch and taste, and so on, but these emotions are taken to be responsive to sensations. Emotions, on the Familiar Account, are second-order perceptions.

There is another central aspect to The Familiar Account: sensations require emotions if they are to impact our actions. The story goes something like this: Emotions are essentially motivational states: they move us to act. Moreover, the motive force constituting our emotions is not itself intentional and is only contingently related to any particular intentional state.² Nonetheless, having an emotion presupposes some prior mental intentional state. First, insofar as an emotion just is a motivational state, and being a motivational state involves being moved in some direction or another, emotions require the idea of some object towards which they might be directed. Since emotions themselves are not intentional, they depend on some other mental state that is intentional to supply that direction. It seems reasonable enough to take sensations to be paradigms of mental intentional states. The view comes full circle by noting too that sensations are not motivational states. These three elements constitute the basic structure of the Familiar Account. Its clear distinction between sensation and emotions can be seen as an advantage.³

Descartes and Spinoza both conceive of our experience of the world in a way that, at a basic level, is importantly different from the model of the Familiar Account. For both, experience is, basically, intrinsically affective, and our sense perceptions fundamentally contain information about the importance of things to us, the sort of information we take as proper to the emotions or passions. So my experience of a dark alley incorporates my fear, and my experience of woods in fresh snow incorporates my joy, without conceiving these experiences as a sense perception (of the alley or the woods) to which I then have an emotional response. I will call this alternative model of experience

² The account of emotions I sketch out here is not usually put in terms of intentional states. Rather, the claim is that emotions are not representational states. Jumping straight to representationality, however, brings with it a set of epistemic concerns. In the way that I am using the terminology, the intentionality of a mental state concerns its content, and getting straight on this is logically prior to considering whether that intentional content can afford us knowledge. It does seem that the Familiar Account takes our emotions to be feelings and without any intentional content. It should be noted that this account is usually associated with Hume, at least insofar as its proponents think of themselves as Humeans. I am not, however, clear that it is Hume's view.

³ The Familiar Account has faced a number of familiar objections. There are issues of how a particular sensation or representational state comes to connect with the emotion or motivational state it does. After all, it is a part of this account that the two sorts of states are only contingently related. There are further related issues of how rational considerations can impact on and redirect motivations. My concern here, however, is not to tackle these issues.

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Passionate Perception. The central tenet of Passionate Perception holds that all perception is affective, and so that sensations and emotions are not to be understood as essentially different kinds of mental states.

Part of my task in this paper is, through readings of Descartes and Spinoza, to clarify this model. Understanding the content of experience to contain fundamentally an affective aspect brings with it a set of questions: How are we to understand the content of experience on this line? Is it possible for the model of Passionate Perception to preserve the somewhat intuitive distinction we make between our experience of an object—a body we sense and which appears as existing external to us—and our experience of emotions—feelings we have that express our evaluations of things in the world around us—while maintaining that sensations and emotions are not different in kind? How on this model are we to understand knowledge as derived from experience? In my discussion of Descartes and Spinoza I will focus on the first two of these questions; I leave answers to the third for another occasion.⁴ The other part of my task will be to clarify not only what Descartes and Spinoza share, but also where they differ, and in particular what issues in Descartes's account Spinoza aims to resolve.

One more preliminary note: While the model of Passionate Perception is an alternative to the Familiar Account, it should not be mistaken for a familiar alternative to the Familiar Account—a cognitivist account of emotions. On this account, emotions are essentially evaluative judgments, and so constitute consciously held beliefs. While cognitivist accounts of emotions do not typically address the question of how emotions relate to sensations, the view would seem to be committed to the idea that our sensory experiences are also species of judgments and constitute consciously held beliefs. We can thus see these accounts as also rejecting the basic presupposition of the Familiar Account. Passionate Perception is a third kind of account of our experience of the world. I will not, however, be able here to demonstrate just how what I am calling Passionate Perception is different from cognitivist accounts.⁵

⁴ In this respect my discussion here is preliminary to a reconsideration of Radner and Della Rocca. Radner is focused on how Spinoza's theory of ideas serves as a criticism to Descartes's epistemology, an epistemology she takes to be focused on clear and distinct perceptions. Della Rocca, in turn, focuses on Spinoza's critique of Descartes's account of judgment, and so of truth and falsity. My concern here is not so much with the epistemic import of our ideas for either Descartes or Spinoza, but rather on how they aim to account for the very content of the ideas caused by external things, irrespective of whether those ideas represent veridically or not.

⁵ One might draw the distinction by noting that Passionate Perception concerns, at its heart, our perception of objects, whereas cognitivist accounts of emotions still want to leave the explanation of object perception entirely in the domain of sensation and so distinguish emotions and sensations as having different proper domains. I am not entirely confident of this way of putting the difference. The difference might simply be a question of emphasis.

Often Spinoza is taken to have a cognitivist account of emotions. See, for instance, ~~David~~ Segal, "Beyond Subjectivity: While for Spinoza, to have an idea of some thing does entail having beliefs about that thing—to take that thing as existing—these beliefs cannot be understood as involving a self-conscious judgment given Spinoza's rejection of any distinction between intellect and will. While I will indirectly touch on what Spinoza might be getting at in his account of ideas here, a full treatment is beyond the scope of this paper. ~~Eugene~~ Marshall, "Spinoza's Cognitive Affect," offers an interesting discussion of matters that relate to this

1. Descartes on emotion and sensation

1.1 Not the familiar account of emotion

According to Descartes, the emotions, or passions, certainly move us to action. As he notes in PA a.40,

the principal effect of all the passions in men is that they incite and dispose the soul to will the things for which they prepare the body. (AT 11:359)

It thus seems clear that our passions, for him, have motivational force.⁶ Fear moves us to flee and courage moves us to stand our ground; love moves us to be with what we love, just as hate moves us to get away from what we hate. Even wonder moves us to focus attention and get to know more about things new to us.

However, it is also clear that, for Descartes, the passions are intentional mental states. That is, for him, it is clear the passions have an intentional object; they, at the very least, purport to be about something. Throughout the *Passions of the Soul* Descartes talks of particular passions as representing, and this would certainly imply some intentional content. Some cases are quite straightforward: “abhorrence is instituted by nature to represent a sudden and unexpected death” (PA a.89; AT 11:394); “delight is particularly instituted by nature to represent the enjoyment of what delights as the greatest of all the good that belong to man” (PA a.90; AT 11:395).

Other cases, though less clear-cut, still invite us to understand the passions as intentional mental states. Consider the accounts of love and hatred. According to Descartes, “love is an excitation [*émotion*]⁷ of the soul, caused by the motion of the spirits, which incites it to join itself in volition to the objects that appear to be suitable to it,” and “hatred is an excitation [*émotion*], caused by the spirits, which incites the soul to will to be separated from the objects that are presented to it as harmful” (PA a.79; AT 11:387). From the perspective of the Familiar Account, it can seem that in characterizing love and hatred as *émotions* of the soul that incite us to act, Descartes is affirming that they are motivational states and thereby effectively denying that they are intentional.⁸ However, his discussion here is better read as simply referring back to his

issue, though I am not inclined to agree with Marshall’s insistence on Spinoza’s commitment to the propositional structure of ideas.

⁶ Often motivational force is identified with feelings of pleasure and pain: pleasure motivates us to pursue things, while pain motivates us to ignore them. It is far from clear to me that this is the only way to cash out motivational force philosophically. Throughout my discussion, I use “motivational force” in a broader sense, of moving us to act.

⁷ I follow Stephen Voss in translating the French *émotion* as excitation, but this does not adequately capture the nuance of Descartes’s own explication of his choice of words. In PA a.28, he claims that the passions are well characterized as *émotions* insofar as they are changes in the soul (as are all thoughts) but also because these stir [*agiter*] and shake [*ébranler*] the soul. I am, however, hard pressed to find another translation without other problems.

⁸ Sean Greenberg argues something along these lines in “Descartes on the Passions,” though his is a variant of the Familiar Account. Greenberg denies that the passions themselves are information-bearing or representational states, though he is willing to allow that the passions can acquire an intentionality through their

definition of the passions as “perceptions or sensations or excitations [*émotions*] of the soul which are referred to it in particular and which are caused, maintained and strengthened by some movement of the spirits” (PA a.27; AT 11:349). Descartes glosses the first part of this definition in PA a.28: the passions are

better named excitations [*émotions*] of the soul, not only because this name may be attributed to all the changes that take place within it, that is, to all the different *thoughts* [*pensées*] that come to it, but in particular because, among all the sorts of *thoughts* [*pensées*] it can have, there are no others which agitate it and shake it so strongly as these passions do. (AT 11:350; emphasis added)

While Descartes does mark *émotions* as stirring us particularly forcefully, he is quite clear here that passions are thoughts, and that *all thoughts* are *émotions* of the soul. Since all thoughts for Descartes are intentional mental states, the passions too are, by Descartes’s lights, intentional mental states.⁹

What then is the intentional content of love and hatred and of other passions? In the case of love, the motion of the animal spirits causes an appearance of suitability; in the case of hatred, a bodily motion causes an appearance of harmfulness. This appearance of suitability or harmfulness itself motivates us to act in the appropriate way.¹⁰ Insofar as

relations to other mental states which are representational. I differ from Greenberg in maintaining that the passions’ intentionality derives from their own proper representationality. See the discussion below regarding the distinction between emotion and sensation for Descartes.

⁹ At the very least, being an excitation of the soul does not preclude its being intentional. In the *Third Meditation* Descartes offers a taxonomy of our thoughts. Some, ideas properly speaking, are “as if images of things,” but we have other thoughts, volitions, emotions, and judgments, which he maintains “include something more than the likeness of that thing” (AT 7:37; 2:88). Descartes is not here denying the intentionality of these other thoughts, but rather is claiming that they include something in addition to their intentional aspect. There is a dispute as to whether, for Descartes, all thoughts are intentional. Lilli Alanen, in *Descartes’s Concept of Mind*, maintains that what is distinctive about Cartesian mental states is that they are representational. Alison Simmons, though she admits that Cartesian mental states are often representational, maintains that awareness distinguishes Cartesian mental states. She leaves open the question of whether there can be non-representational mental states for Descartes. Nonetheless, as I understand Simmons, even non-representational mental states, for Descartes, would still have presentational content, and so, in the sense I am employing here, would be intentional mental states. See her “Cartesian Sensations,” “Changing the Cartesian Mind,” and “Descartes on the Cognitive Structure.” As noted above, Greenberg, “Descartes on the Passions,” denies that the passions are representational mental states but allows that they might be intentional.

¹⁰ Sometimes it does seem that Descartes takes the passions to *result* from intentional states, and not necessarily to be intentional themselves. In his first round of definitions of the particular passions he claims that our judging an object which has surprised us to be new or different from our past experience “makes us [*fait que*] wonder and be astonished at it” (PA a.53; AT 11:373); that when something “is represented to us . . . as being suitable to us, this makes us have [*nous fait avoir*] love for it” and that a representation of something as harmful “excites us to hatred” (PA a.56; AT 11:374); that “consideration of a present good excites joy in us, that of evil sadness, when it is a good or an evil which is represented as belonging to us” (PA a.61; AT 11:376). While Descartes is clearly concerned here with ideas about something’s being good or bad for us, these passages do not compel us to take the passions associated with these ideas as *themselves* about the way things benefit and harm us. They do not rule out, however, the passions being intentional in this way. Moreover, it is worth noting that these passages do cut against the very definition of the passions as caused by motions of the animal spirits. Though one might well think that the passions could be excited or otherwise caused by other thoughts, Descartes is clear that the passions typically and in the first instance have a bodily cause. For this reason, I prefer to read Descartes here as detailing the intentional content constituting (at least in part) the passions at issue here.

In his discussion of the union of mind and body, Descartes makes clear that, while our sensations might not convey information about the natures of things, the variation in our sensory experiences does convey information about the variation in the material world.¹³ In so doing, our sensations also convey information about the ways in which things benefit and harm us as unions of mind and body. He writes:

And from the fact that I perceive by my senses a great variety of colours, sounds, smells and tastes, as well as differences in heat, hardness and the like, I am correct in inferring that the bodies which are the source of these various sensory perceptions possess differences corresponding to them, though perhaps not resembling them. Also, the fact that some of the perceptions are agreeable to me while others are disagreeable make it quite certain that my body or rather my whole self, in so far as I am a combination of body and mind, can be affected by the various beneficial or harmful bodies which surround it. (AT 7:81; CSM 2:56)

Thus, our sensations of color, while presenting a body as colored, do not tell us anything about any real colour of that body. Instead, our sensations of colour convey information about real variations in the world, and insofar as we have that information we also have direction in navigating our way through the world. Moreover, our sensations are either agreeable or disagreeable, and through this aspect of our sensations we are steered towards what is beneficial and away from what is harmful to us. Descartes makes a similar point a few paragraphs later:

the proper purpose of the sensory perceptions given me by nature is simply to inform the mind of what is beneficial or harmful for the composite of which the mind is a part; and to this extent they are sufficiently clear and distinct. But I misuse them by treating them as reliable touchstones for immediate judgments about the essential nature of the bodies located outside us. (AT 7:83; CSM 2:57–8)

Rather than informing us about the natures of things in themselves, our sensations inform us about how things are in relation to us, how they benefit and harm us, and in general how they affect our well-being.¹⁴ Of course, as Descartes recognizes, we can be mistaken about the benefits and harms things offer us—for instance, we can feel thirsty when we ought not to take in more fluids—but for Descartes we experience sensations in accord with the system which “is most especially and most frequently conducive to the preservation of the healthy man” (AT 7:88; CSM 2:60).

Note that on this account of sensation, it seems that sensations, just as much as passions, are about the ways things benefit and harm us. But there is more. For Descartes, sensations just as much as passions, move us to action. In the *Sixth Meditation*, the paradigm sensations are hunger, thirst, pain, and the like, and when we are hungry we are moved to eat, when we are thirsty we are moved to drink, and when we feel pain, we are moved to avoid it. Even sensations of variation in color move us to

¹³ Simmons, “Cartesian Sensations,” has a nice discussion of this point.

¹⁴ ~~He does make~~ a similar point.

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navigate through the world in one way rather than another. This is simply further evidence that Descartes's view is not that of the Familiar Account; for him, not only are passions intentional states, but also sensations are motivational states.¹⁵

2. The distinction between emotions and sensation: representation, presentation, and Descartes's model of Passionate Perception

I have argued that sensations and passions are both intentional states with similar intentional content—both are about benefits and harms to us. Moreover, both move us to action. Thus, there seems to be no difference in kind between sensations and emotions. Descartes's account thus not only is not the familiar one, *but* it also involves rejecting the central presupposition of the Familiar Account: that sensations and emotions are different kinds of mental states. However, this also leaves Descartes with a problem. For one, Descartes seems committed to drawing a distinction between sensations and emotions. Furthermore, he seems right to do so. The distinction we do draw between emotions and sensations is not simply idle taxonomy *but* seems to mark an epistemic difference between seeing or hearing or smelling something, on the one hand, and rejoicing in or being annoyed by something on the other.¹⁶ It is not clear, on the reading I've offered, what basis Descartes has for drawing the distinction he seems rightly to want to retain. Addressing this issue will bring into focus the affective dimension of Descartes's account of sense perception, that is, his particular brand of Passionate Perception.

Let me first rule out one kind of answer. It might be tempting to think that the principal difference between sensations and emotions rests in their physiological aetiology. Descartes sometimes suggests this. In *Principles IV*, for instance, he identifies so-called external sensations and internal sensations as species of sensory awareness which "come about by means of the nerves" (AT 8A:315; CSM 1:280). He goes on to explain the variation in our sensory awareness by "the differences in the nerves themselves, and secondly of differences in the sorts of motions which occur in particular nerves" (AT 8A:316; CSM 1:280). The account is not without philosophical interest. It can afford an account of the variability in how sensations and emotions come to be joined with one another—of how we rejoice at seeing an old friend and feel disgust at the smell of meat on one day, and then disdain, if not disgust, at seeing the old friend, and rejoice at the smell of meat the next. The association of mental states is derived from an association of physiological states—one day the bodily motion

¹⁵ This discussion is suggestive that the Familiar Account derives from a resemblance account of sensory representation. I cannot pursue this suggestion here.

¹⁶ Interestingly, in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.2.13, Hume seems to claim that we are misguided in taking there to be any epistemic difference, not only between ideas of primary and secondary qualities, but also between those ideas and ideas of pain and pleasure.

resulting from the stimulation of our eyes by our friend is joined with motions proper to joy, but the next it is joined with the motions proper to disdain; one day the motions in our olfactory nerves caused by the meat is joined with those proper to disgust, but the next they are joined with motions proper to joy. However, even if this speculative physiology were true, it tells us little about how sensations and emotions are to be distinguished as *mental* states. And I do not think that in his ultimate account Descartes distinguishes sensations from emotions in purely physiological terms.

To see how else Descartes might distinguish sensations from emotions, let us return to the issue of the intentional content of sensations and emotions. To this end, it is helpful to distinguish two senses in which a mental state can have intentional content, or be about something. On the one hand, a mental state can have *representational content*. I identify the representational content of a mental state with the information it conveys.¹⁷ On the other hand, a mental state can have *presentational content*.¹⁸ That is, we can understand it to concern how that mental state has things appear to us. It might be the case that a mental state is only intentional in one of these ways: it might convey information without our being aware of it, and so without presenting anything. Or it might be that an idea presents something but actually conveys no information.¹⁹ Equally, what an idea represents could conform to what it presents, or alternatively, an idea can represent, or give us information about, something quite different than what it presents.

In my discussion thus far, I have focused on the passions' presentational content—what they seem to be about, namely, the way things benefit or harm us or are generally important to us—and I have thus left open the question of whether that presentational content is also what they represent, or whether they actually represent anything at all.²⁰ In my discussion of Descartes's account of sensation, however, I focused not on what sensations present or seem to be about—namely, objects—but on what they represent:

¹⁷ This notion of representational mental content is closely related to Margaret Wilson's notion of causal or *referential* representation. See Wilson, "Representationality of Sensation." Wilson's notion of referential representational content singles out that content which does not simply purport to be about the world, but is actually (veridically) about it. On Wilson's line, Descartes was most likely to subscribe to a causal account of reference. And this is perhaps because she seems to assume that Descartes holds a resemblance account of representation, or at least one that holds that our sensations ought to give us information about the real properties of things. On my reading, too, representational intentional content singles out that content which does in fact connect us to the world, but it does not restrict this connection to a simply causal one. An idea can convey information about the world in any number of ways, including functionally. That is, the information that is conveyed need not be about properties of things proper; it can be about relations or relational properties.

¹⁸ Again, my notion of presentational intentional content derives from Wilson's notion of presentational representation, and in this case the two notions are nearly identical. Both single out just what an idea appears to be about—whether it is actually about that or not. However, again, I prefer to use language of intentionality.

¹⁹ Calvin Normore has maintained that this is the case with materially false ideas. See his "Meaning and Objective Being."

²⁰ In what follows I will assume that passions are representational, though I do provide some support for this assumption.

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sensations present or seem to be about—namely, objects—but on what they represent: they convey information about the ways things benefit and harm us. Let me now pursue these issues further.

In Descartes's discussion of the distinction between external sensations, internal sensations and emotions in the *Passions*, he groups sensations and passions together as those perceptions which "come to the soul by the mediation of the nerves" (PA a.22; AT 11:345), just as he does in the *Principles* IV.²¹ Though he has not at this point forsaken his speculative physiology—as his painstaking articulation of the physiology proper to each passion and its expression indicates—he no longer aims to distinguish mental states by their physiological aetiology. Rather, here he notes that

There exists this difference among them. We refer [*rapporçons*] some of them to objects outside us which strike our senses, and others to our body, or some of its parts, and finally others to the soul. (*ibid.*)

In the *Passions*, then, Descartes distinguishes kinds of perceptions by what they are referred to. Understanding what Descartes means by *rapporтер* (the term that is translated by "refer") is somewhat tricky, but I suggest that we think of what we refer our perceptions to as their *presentational* content. That is, what we refer our perceptions to is what they appear to be about or what they present us with. External sensations present us with an external object, internal sensations present us with a state of our body, and emotions present us with how things are important to us, what might be called a state of our soul. In each of these cases, we take our perceptions to actually be about what they seem to be about; that is, we refer them to their apparent objects.

Note first that, on this reading, there is, for Descartes, a difference between what sensations represent and what they present. As we have seen, sensations represent, or convey information about, the way things benefit and harm us, but they present us with objects. What about the passions? While I have not argued for this claim fully here, I do think it makes sense to claim that the passions too represent, or convey information about, the way things benefit and harm us. The passions, after all, are mental states caused by movements in the body in just the way sensations are. There is no reason to think the mechanism of conveying information is any different. And insofar as information is conveyed to the mind, the passions would contain that information.²² What is distinctive about the passions is that they not only represent the way things benefit and harm us, they also present us with much the same content.

At this point in the development of the interpretation, we can begin to see the shape of Descartes's account of Passionate Perception. On the reading of Descartes I have been sketching, our basic experience of the world has an intrinsically affective aspect insofar as all perception conveys information about, or represents, benefits and harms.

²¹ See also PA a.28. There^T in his explanation of why he defines the passions as "*sentiments*" he expressly assimilates them to our sensations of external objects.

²² Sean Greenberg and I diverge on our analysis of Cartesian passions at this point.

For that information is precisely what characterizes affective responses. Perception is not, basically, on this model, about the properties of things, but rather about how things in the world relate to us. Nonetheless, on Descartes's view, information about our relations with other things, how things benefit or harm or are otherwise important to us, can appear, or be presented, to us in different ways. As just noted, in the case of the passions, the information appears to us as benefits, harms, and in general the way things are important to us. In the case of our sensations, it appears to us as objects. On this model, then, sensations and passions do not differ in kind; they are at the same level of cognition, and both are both intentional and motivational mental states. Nor do they differ in virtue of what I have called their representational content. Rather, sensations and passions differ in what I have called their presentational content. The Cartesian taxonomy of the mind is founded on the different ways things can appear to us.

The model, however, invites further questions. Given the similarity in kind of the representational content of perceptions, what explains the difference of presentational content? What is it that leads us to have an array of sensations of external objects, sensations of our bodies, and emotions? And what explains things being presented to us in the particular way they are at a given time? Why is it that it is not best that we simply feel passions, rather than have sensations, if the passions actually present the information conveyed in perception? In the most general terms, how are we to understand the relation between representational content and presentational content of intentional mental states? Descartes leaves these questions unresolved. I want to suggest that Spinoza, in his *Ethics*, modifies the model of Passionate Perception in an effort, if not to address them then to circumvent them.

3. Spinoza on emotion and sensation

Considering Spinoza's account of perception and seeing how it bears on modeling Passionate Perception involves a shift in terminology. I have framed my discussion in terms of sensations and emotions, but Spinoza himself does not cast his discussion in either of these terms. What we recognize as emotions are, for Spinoza, affects. And remarkably, Spinoza hardly uses the term "sensation" at all.²³ Instead, he is concerned with images and imaginations.

²³ I can find only three instances: E1Appendix: "The other notions [of good, evil, order, confusion, warm, cold, beauty, ugliness through which natural things are explained] are also nothing but modes of imagining, by which the imagination is variously affected; and yet the ignorant consider them the chief attributes of things... and call the nature of a thing good or evil, sound or rotten and corrupt, as they are affected by it. For example, if the motion the nerves receive from object presented through the eyes are 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, and the like; and finally, those which move the ears are said to produce noise, sound or harmony. That is why, when they contemplated natural things, they thought of nothing less than they did of the divine nature; and when

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3.1 *Affects and imaginations and the Familiar Account*

Just as the passions are motivating of action for Descartes, so too for Spinoza are the affects motivating of action. Spinoza defines what he means by the term "affect" at the beginning of Part 3 of the *Ethics*²⁴:

By affect I understand affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time [simul] the idea of these affections (E3D3).²⁵

According to Spinoza, the essence of each particular thing is its *conatus* or striving to persevere in its being (E3P7). Insofar as we do persevere, we maintain or increase our power of acting. So, it is our essence to strive to maintain our power of acting. If our power of acting decreases, by our essence we will be moved to act to regain that lost power. Equally, if our power of acting increases, by our essence we will be moved to sustain that power. The affects, then, as Spinoza defines them are motivating of action towards persevering in existence.²⁶

Also just as does Descartes, it seems clear that Spinoza takes the affects to be intentional states. In order to clarify this claim, and so to properly understand how Spinoza breaks from the Familiar Account, we need to grapple with Spinoza's account of intentionality more generally.

afterwards they directed their minds to contemplating the divine nature, they could think nothing less than of their first fictions, on which they had built the knowledge of natural things, because they could not assist knowledge of the divine nature. So it is no wonder that they have generally contradicted themselves."

E2P10CS: "The cause of this [confusion about the relation between God and created things], I believe, was that they did not observe the [proper] order of philosophizing. For they believed that the divine nature, which they should have contemplated before all else (because it is prior both in knowledge and in nature) is last in the order of knowledge, and the things which are called objects of sense are prior to all."

E2P40S2: In outlining the three kinds of knowledge, he notes that we form universal notions "from singular things which have been represented to us through the senses in a way that is mutilated, confused and without order for the intellect."

There are other uses of "sense" (forms of the Latin *[sentire]*), but these uses seem to invoke a general feeling or sensibility rather than an awareness or apprehension of the properties of particular objects. See E2ax4 and E2ax5; E2P13C; E2P49S; E3P26S; E3P50; E3P57S; E4P59; E4P57. E5P23s does align sensing with knowledge, but does not suggest that the sensation at issue is through the sense organs: "Still we feel [sentimus] and know by experience that we are eternal."

²⁴ References to Spinoza will be cited internally using the following abbreviations: the first numeral refers to parts; "d" means definition; "T" means axiom; "p" means proposition; "dem" means demonstration; "post" means postulate; "c" means corollary; "s" means scholium; e.g. 4p37s means Ethics, part 4, proposition 37, scholium. Unless otherwise noted, translations are from Edwin Curley (tr.), *Collected Writings of Spinoza*.

²⁵ The general definition of the affects at the end of Part 3 expands on the second clause of this definition, attending to the affects as ideas rather than bodily states. But given Spinoza's doctrine of parallelism—that the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things (E2P7)—these two definitions are equivalent.

²⁶ Martin Lin offers a very good discussion of Spinoza's account of action in "Teleology and Human Action."

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Typically, accounts of intentionality aim to explicate just how an idea connects up with the world. These accounts quite naturally aim to explain the cognitive life of persons, since it is assumed an idea is had by an individual thinking subject. Part of the difficulty of Spinoza's account lies in the fact that he does not take a person, an individual thinking subject, as his starting point. Rather his account begins from the point of view of God, or the totality of nature. Although there are infinitely many infinite attributes through which the totality of Nature can be conceived, or which express the "eternal and infinite essence" of God,²⁷ extension and thought are those attributes through which we human beings conceive of Nature, and they are the attributes on which Spinoza focuses. Ideas are modes of thought, and finite bodies in motion are modes of extension.

Spinoza's account of intentionality—or his account of how ideas connect up with the material world—begins from his doctrine of parallelism. For him "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" (E2P7). As I understand this claim, it entails that modes of extension (finite bodies) and modes of thought (ideas) are equivalent or parallel expressions of the same thing, namely parts of Nature.²⁸ While this interpretation merits further argument—including an account of what it might mean to be a part of the eternal and immutable essence of God *simpliciter*—if it is correct we can see that, metaphysically speaking, a mode of thinking is identical with that mode of extension that holds a parallel place in the causal order to that it holds in the logical order. The two modes are the same thing under different descriptions.

This parallelism allows for one sense in which an idea can be understood to have intentional content: each idea is about that body with which it is a parallel expression of a part of Nature. Spinoza characterizes this intentional relation as that between an idea and its object [*objectum*]. For this reason I will refer to this sense of intentional content as *objective content*. So, for instance, for Spinoza, the human mind is a very complex idea that has as its object the human body (E2P13). The human mind thus is objectively about the human body. Similarly, an idea within the human mind will have as its object a particular state or part of the human body. An idea in the mind is objectively about a state or part of the body. It should be clear that insofar as he holds that all ideas have objective content, Spinoza holds that affects (or emotions), insofar as they are ideas, have objective content, and so are intentional states. At the very least, in this way Spinoza parts from the Familiar Account.²⁹

²⁷ See E1D6, and the myriad of propositions that rely on that definition.

²⁸ Yitzhak Melamed in "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Substance," defends this view, and in particular takes issue with Edwin Curley's materialist reading of Spinoza in *Behind the Geometrical Method*.

²⁹ This point alone is enough to raise a questions of how on Spinoza's account we are to distinguish sensations and emotions. Spinoza might claim that sensations differ from emotions insofar as they have

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Nonetheless, the sense of intentionality invoked here—objective content—is a peculiar one, for insofar as the intentional relation is one of metaphysical identity, there is no way that an idea can fail to be about its object. In some way, within the Spinozist system, this is as it should be, since objective content is proper to the totality of Nature, or ~~the perspective of~~ God. Indeed, Spinoza does claim that in God's intellect, ideas contain no error (E1P17S4), and that "all ideas, insofar as they are related to God, are true" (E2P32). However, if we are afforded no room for error, it is not clear what we gain from any talk of intentionality of ideas, or of what ideas are about. Why not simply talk of the things themselves, or perhaps the things expressed under one attribute or another? Intentionality has epistemic implications, but Spinoza's notion of objective content seems to be a straightforward metaphysical relation. We finite things are, of course, not God, and so epistemic matters are of no small interest to us. It is possible for ideas, insofar as they are related to us, that is, insofar as they are *our* ideas, to *mis*represent. It is important for us to be able to make sense of that misrepresentation if we are to have any hope of improving our understanding.

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Spinoza's account, however, does allow for a second sense of intentionality. This second sense affords not only a line of approach to the epistemic issues but also insight into his account of perception and of the role of the affects in that account. In seeing the role of the affects in perceptual content we can understand the intentionality of the affects and Spinoza's brand of Passionate Perception.

Insight into this second sense of intentionality comes into view most clearly through Spinoza's discussion of imagination. In E2P17S4, he sets out how he uses the term "imagine" ¹

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to retain the customary words, the affections of the human body whose ideas present [*repraesentant*] external bodies as present [*praesentia*] to us, we shall call images of things, though they do not reproduce [*referunt*] the external figures of things. And when the mind regards bodies in this way, we shall say that it imagines.³⁰ (E2P17S)

Our imaginings, for Spinoza, are thus about the objects that seem to be before us. And insofar as imagining involves having an idea of something as being before, or present to, us, it is clear that imagining would include our sensory experiences; a sensory experience is nothing if not having an idea of something as being before us. However, sensations do not exhaust the category of imaginings for Spinoza. Imaginations include memories (E2P17C), and what we today think of as imagining—simply calling

different *objecta*—that is, they differ in the kind of bodily states they are objectively about. This way of going would resonate with that Descartes offers in *Principles* [V], though Spinoza would, of course, reject the causal interaction between mind and body which marks Descartes's account.

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³⁰ Curley in his translation translates *representare* as "to present." I take the sense of "present" here to be akin to the sense in play in the notion of presentational intentional content I introduced earlier. For it seems that what Spinoza is driving at here is this: the ideas which correspond to movements in the body (images) caused by external things (without reproducing or resembling them) are just how the world is manifest mentally. Through these ideas, things seem to us to be a certain way.

HOW WE EXPERIENCE THE WORLD 207

to mind an idea, as when I imagine what my dog might be doing while out with the dog walker, or I imagine what I might have for dinner.

The interpretive challenge for ~~interpreter~~ of Spinoza has been understanding just how it is that our imaginations are about, or present as existing, their objects, and in particular how this is different from the way in which an idea has objective content.³¹ Spinoza illustrates the difference through the example of Paul's idea of Peter in the same scholium in which imagination is defined:

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We clearly understand what is the difference between the idea of, say, Peter, which constitutes the essence of Peter's mind, and the idea of Peter which is in another man, say in Paul. For the former directly explains the essence of Peter's body, and does not involve existence, except so long as Peter exists; but the latter indicates the condition of Paul's body more than Peter's nature, and therefore, while that condition of Paul's body lasts, Paul's mind will still regard Peter as present to itself, even though Peter does not exist. (E2P17S)

Paul's idea of Peter is thus importantly different from the idea of Peter constituting Peter's mind. The latter idea has Peter's body as its objective content. The former idea, however, presents Peter as existing to Paul, that is, it is Paul's imagining of Peter. I will call the sense in which Paul's idea is about Peter, or the second sense of intentionality in which an idea in an individual's mind presents an object as existing, *imaginative content*.

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It is clear that, for Spinoza, while there must be some relation between the objective and imaginative content of any idea, what we imagine does not typically conform to the natures of things that actually exist. But how then do we come up with the imaginings we do? How is it that things are presented to us as existing in the way they are? According to Spinoza, the human mind does not perceive any external body as existing except through the ideas of the affections of its own body (E2P26). Paul imagines Peter through the ideas of the various ways in which his body has been affected by external causes, including by Peter. But the story cannot be so simple as a causal account of imaginative content, one which explains Paul's imagining of Peter by the causal impact of Peter on Paul's body. For Spinoza, there is an order to nature; all things, and so all bodies, and all ideas, are causally connected. A particular thing, a human body, say, is causally connected, not only with the things currently impacting it directly, but also with the various things that have causally impacted those things, and all the other bodies which have causally affected them, and so on ad infinitum (E1P28). Paul's body is affected not only by Peter, but also by the intermediary entities effecting the causal interaction between Peter's body and his, and equally, it is affected by all those bodies which have affected Peter's body to make it as it is at the time it is affecting Paul. Spinoza owes us an explanation of how the imaginative content of Paul's idea of Peter is fixed to make it the idea of *Peter*, as opposed to of some other body within the

³¹ See, for instance, Radner, "Spinoza's Theory of Ideas," and Della Rocca, *Representation*.

causal nexus. That is, Spinoza faces a problem endemic to any causal account of representation, that of fixing the imaginative content of an idea.³²

H33 ← E1 Affects and imaginings

On the face of it, Spinoza's account of the affects seems orthogonal to this problem in Spinoza's account of mental content. Given that the title of Part 3 of the *Ethics* is *Of the Affects* [*De Affectibus*], it is natural to assume that his definition of "affect" at the beginning of this part sets out the scope of the subject of Part 3. As I argued above, it is clear from this definition that the affects are motivational. From the perspective of the Familiar Account, which, recall, draws a distinction in kind between motivational and intentional mental states, it is not clear to what use Spinoza's account of the affects could be put in resolving the questions around his account of imaginative content.

However, E2P17, along with the discussion of imagination itself in its scholium, explicitly concerns affections of the human body and the ideas we have of those affections, just what is defined in E3D3 as an affect. Consider the proposition itself:

If the human body is affected with a mode that involves the nature of an external body, the human mind will regard that body as actually existing, or as present to it, until the body is affected by an affect [*affectu*] that excludes the existence or presence of that body.

And recall the E2P17S account of images and imagination as "the affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present to us" and the mind's regard of "bodies in this way," respectively. It is tempting to think that the uses of "affection" and "affect" are different than how these terms are defined in Part 3. After all, if they weren't, wouldn't it be a deviation from the geometrical method to wait until Part 3 to define "affection" and "affect"? Moreover, the definition of E3D3 of affects—as "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and the same time, the ideas of these affections"³³—confuses rather than clarifies this usage, at least from the point of view of the Familiar Account. For that account takes our ideas of objects—of bodies that are present to us—to attach to affective states, but not as themselves intrinsically differentially impacting our power of acting. If our imaginings are just ideas of existing objects, then, they should not be affects, according to E3D3. And yet E2P17S does characterize imaginings as affects. Are then our imaginings about the differential impact on our body's power of acting?

³² This question of how the imaginative content of an idea is fixed is logically prior to the epistemic questions that motivated the appeal to imaginative content. We need to understand the content of an idea of which we are aware before we are in a position to evaluate whether what we are aware of is accurately representing or misrepresenting its object. My concern here is to understand just how imaginative content is constituted. I will not be able to address the epistemic implications of the view I attribute to Spinoza.

³³ A passion is just an affection caused, at least in part, by something external to us, whereas an action is an affection for which we can be an adequate cause.

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Descartes do share a basic framework for thinking about sensations and emotions, and the differences between them.

As plausible as this seems, I do not think that this is a right way to understand Spinoza's relation to Descartes. I will have more to say about Spinoza's positive view and its relation to Descartes in the next section, but here I want to argue against a view which would have Spinozistic imaginations be non-motivational. First, as we have already noted in considering the case of Paul's idea of Peter, for Spinoza, we only have an idea of external body as present—an imagination—insofar as we are affected by that external body. However, it is important to note just how Spinoza sets up his introduction of imagination. E2P16 is devoted to explicating the claim that our ideas, insofar as they are ideas of a particular human mind, that is, *our* ideas, ~~they~~ involve the nature of our body as much as they involve the nature of the external body they present. Thus, the human mind “perceives the nature of external bodies together with the nature of its own body” (E2P16C1), and, centrally to the point at issue here, “the ideas which we have of external bodies indicates the condition of our own body more than the nature of the external body” (E2P16C2). So for Spinoza, *our* ideas of external bodies are about the condition of our bodies more than they are about the nature of that external body. E2P17 fleshes out this point, and so it seems that for Spinoza our imaginations, our ideas presenting a body as existing, *are* about the condition of our body, about the way things affect us, *more than* they are about the properties of existing bodies. H-1

Nonetheless, one might agree that, for Spinoza, imaginings and affects both are about the condition of our body, but maintain that imaginings simply are about states of our body that are indifferent to our continuing to persevere in our being. Affects proper, on the other hand, are about states of our body that do concern our persevering. On this reading, imaginings would still not be motivational while affects would be so. In E3Post1, Spinoza does allow for some affections which have no differential impact on our power of acting: “The human body can be affected in many ways in which its power of acting is increased or diminished, and also in others which render its power of acting neither greater or less.” And this conclusion can seem supported by the account he offers of affects such as love and hate, and other affects internal to the propositions. In E3P13, he writes:

H E3P13S

From this we understand clearly what love and hate are. Love is nothing but joy with the accompanying [*concomitante*] idea of an external cause, and hate is nothing but sadness with the accompanying [*concomitante*] idea of an external cause.

It can seem natural to read Spinoza as here explaining how our ideas of an external cause—our imaginations—are themselves intrinsically neutral with respect to our power of acting, but then come to “accompany” an affect.

Again, however, this reading is too simple. For one, there is nothing in Spinoza's view that precludes affects presenting objects as existing, just as do imaginings. That is, the bodily affections which parallel the affects are causally connected to external bodies in just the same way the bodily images parallel to imaginings are. Insofar as imaginings

present external bodies as existing in virtue of those causal relations, so too should the affects. Furthermore, Spinoza himself does not explicitly identify imaginations and those affects that are neutral with regard to our *conatus*, and there is no good reason to presuppose he implicitly does so. In this regard, it is useful to reconsider the definitions of the affects. Other than joy, sadness, and desire, every affect is *defined* as involving an imagination.³⁵ While Spinoza's language is similar to that in the definition of love and hate—as a primitive affect accompanied by imagination—it is clear that the imagination itself is integral to the non-primitive affects. Insofar as affects such as love, hatred, inclination, hope, fear, and so on, are a distinct species of increase or decrease of power to act, and so distinct from the joy or sadness which figures in them, it must be the case that the imaginative dimension of these affects *itself* impacts our power to act. Moreover, it is clear that our imaginations themselves have this differential impact on our power of acting. Consider E3P12: "The mind as far as it can, strives to imagine those things that increase or aid the body's power of acting." The proposition itself suggests that our ~~imaginations our~~ taking some thing to be present, itself stands to change our power of acting, and the demonstration affirms this unequivocally, appealing quite simply to E2P7, the principle of parallelism:

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So long as the human body is affected with a mode that involves the nature of an external body, the human mind will regard the same body as present (by 2P17) and consequently (by 2P7) so long as the human mind regards some external body as present, that (by 2P17S), imagines it, the human body is affected with a mode that involves the nature of that external body. Hence, so long as the mind imagines those things that increase or aid our body's power of acting, the body is affected with modes that increase or aid its power of acting (see Post(1)), and consequently (by P11) the mind's power of thinking is increased or aided. Therefore, (by P6 or P9), the mind, as far as it can, strives to imagine those things, q.e.d.

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Just representing an external body as present to us can involve an increase (or presumably a decrease) of our power of acting. That is, an imagination *is* properly speaking an affect, according to the definition of Part 3.

Just as these points demonstrate that imaginations are motivational for Spinoza, they also reveal that affects are intentional not only in having objective content but also in having imaginative content. For Spinoza, almost all the affects contain the idea of something present to us. Being affected involves apprehending a thing as impacting our continued existence, and that intrinsically involves imagining the object of our affection, that is, it intrinsically involves imaginative content.

³⁵ The definitions of the three primitive affects of joy, sadness, and desire do not include an imagining. It is hard to know how to situate these with respect to the rest of Spinoza's account. I am inclined to think that they each comprise a dimension along which an external cause can affect our power to persevere. Defense of this claim is beyond the scope of this paper, but in his enumeration of the affects at the end of Part 3, Spinoza characterizes desire, joy, and sadness in a way that suggests they are different in kind from the affects proper.

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H 4.

Passionate Perception in Spinoza

As should be clear by now, despite initial appearances that Spinoza's account aligns with the Familiar Account, it denies central features of that account. First, for Spinoza, most of the affects, what we would recognize as emotions, are both motivational and intentional states. Equally, our imaginings—the ideas of external causes we can recognize as sensations—are characterized rightly as affects, and so as motivational in the same way, insofar as they do involve the impact of those causes on our power to persevere.³⁶ There is another aspect of Spinoza's account that further distances it from the Familiar Account. For him, the affects proper are *not* second-order ideas. It might be tempting to think of affects as representing the increases or decreases in our *conatus* by comparing the “force of existing” in two imaginings. In this case, the affects would be second-order ideas. However, Spinoza explicitly rules this model of the affects out. In his exposition of the general definition of the affects at the end of Part 3, Spinoza writes:

But it should be noted that when I say *a greater or lesser force of existing than before*, I do not understand that the mind compares its body's present constitution with a past constitution, but that the idea which constitutes the form of the affect affirms of the body something which really involves more or less of reality than before. (E3 General Definition of the Affects)

It is hard to know how to understand the claim that an affect is an affirmation that our bodily constitution involves more or less reality, but it is clear that Spinoza unequivocally denies that the affects involve a comparison of two ideas of the body's constitution. They are thus not to be taken as ideas of ideas, or second-order ideas. Both imaginings and affects are first-order ideas for Spinoza. And on these two general lines, Descartes and Spinoza agree; neither aligns well with the Familiar Account. However, I want to suggest that Descartes and Spinoza part ways in the alternative account of Passionate Perception they offer.

Recall the problem facing Descartes. Descartes, on the interpretation I have sketched, locates the essentially affective dimension of experience in the representational content of our bodily caused ideas: he maintains that both sensations and passions represent the ways in which things benefit and harm us. Nonetheless, he wants to maintain that the two kinds of mental states present things differently. But he offers no explanation for this differentiation. Why do we experience sensations of objects in some cases and passions in others? Is it a function of the representational content or is there some other explanation?

To see how Spinoza aims to circumvent this problem, we have to see that Spinoza positions our imaginations of objects and affects in a very different way. To this end, let us return to the problem Spinoza faced regarding the fixing of imaginative content.

³⁶ While there might be cases where we can have an idea of an external cause which has no impact on our well-being, they are extraordinary rather than paradigmatic.

Recall that Spinoza owed us an answer to the question of how things are presented to us as existing in the way they are. In particular, a simple appeal to the causal connection to our body of the thing we imagine provides an insufficient answer given Spinoza's insistence on the causal interconnection of every existing thing. Why should we imagine one link in the causal chain rather than other? Following a suggestion of Don Garrett, I want to suggest, that for Spinoza, the content of our imaginations—that is, the content of our ideas of which we are aware—is in part determined by the affects. In this way, Spinoza effectively rejects the view that our ideas of objects and our emotions are two different species of idea.

In a recent paper, Don Garrett has suggested that we might understand the affects, or passions, as manners of conceiving of ideas, and that this manner of conceiving serves to fix the imaginative intentional content of an imagination.³⁷ Each of our ideas consists in an array of ideas, containing, as a whole, information about how we are situated causally in the world. But we are faced with a problem of making sense of this torrent of information. How are we to attend to some feature of our causal situation? How are we to pick out one object as the one affecting us? The affects serve as a lens focusing our awareness. In doing so, they illuminate some element of the array of ideas, such that we become aware of and identify some object as existing and present to us. Insofar as we become aware of one element of our array of ideas, we fix the imaginative content of our idea, and we imagine an object. That is, it is through the affects that the human mind settles on one object rather than one of the infinitely many others in the causal order, and so through the affects that Spinoza solves the problem of the causal account of reference. On Garrett's interpretation, while something exists independently of our awareness, or imagination, and figures in the content of the idea causally,³⁸ the manner of perception, or being aware of something, is not an accidental feature. It is integral to what we find ourselves aware of. If we abstract away from the manner of perceiving, we effectively transform the content of the idea. ~~On Garrett's view affects are integral to the content of our perception—~~ what we are aware of as existing. Equally, we should not understand the manner of perception as separable from the content conceived. There is no sense to be made of a perceiving something without having perceived it in some manner or another, and so too manners of conceiving are not to be thought of as being applied to a particular content which has an independent existence. In this way too, the manner of conception is integral to the imaginative content of the idea.

While Garrett is principally concerned with the problems facing Spinoza's account of imagination, and in particular that of the fixing of imaginative content given Spinoza's causal account of representation, his proposal also is suggestive with regard

³⁷ Don Garrett, "Representation and Misrepresentation in Spinoza's Psychology."

³⁸ It is important to note that the content at issue here need not be identified with objective content; it need not consist of the bodily state parallel to the perception at issue, though it would stand in a causal relation to it.

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role in the imaginative content of the idea. Thinking of the affects as in part constituting an idea's imaginative content provides an elegant way of accommodating Spinoza's willingness to talk of imaginations as affects and to incorporate imaginations into his discussion of the affects. For on this reading, Spinoza's language is wholly appropriate: imaginations are intrinsically affective and equally, the affects are constitutive of our imaginations. Moreover, Garrett's interpretation affords a way of understanding Spinoza as resolving the issue of the distinction between imaginings and affects by folding them together into one kind of mental state. On this reading, being conscious of the world around us, or put another way, experiencing the world around us, essentially involves the affects—we cannot become aware of, or perceive, any object in the world without the affects. For Spinoza, all perception is passionate perception.³⁹

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4 Conclusion

Let me conclude by remarking on some interesting points of connection between Descartes's and Spinoza's models of Passionate Perception. Neither thinker subscribes to the central tenet of what I have called the Familiar Account: that sensations and emotions are different genera of mental states. Rather, both thinkers take sensations and emotions to be both intentional and motivational states, and at the same cognitive level. In this way, both take our experience of the world as infused with the sort of concern for ourselves that we identify with the passions. Conceiving of perception in this way comes with a potential cost, for there is on this way of thinking a problem of retrieving a common-sensical distinction between our sensations and emotions. Descartes, it seems, salvages this distinction through a contrast between representational content and presentational content. Sensations and emotions represent the same kinds of things, but differ in how they present those things to us. Sensation and emotions are still, for Descartes, phenomenologically different kinds of states, and as such he would seem to owe an explanation of how two species of states with the same kind of representational content come to appear to us so differently. Spinoza's view, as I have sketched it out here, avoids these questions facing Descartes's account. For Spinoza, following Garrett's reading, a sensation of an object is not different from an emotion, but rather requires an emotion as a way of conceiving *that* object at all. On this line, for Spinoza, any phenomenological distinction we might want to draw between sensations and emotions would be a matter of whether we attend more to the object of attention or to the manner through which we come to attend or conceive of that object. Sensations and emotions are thus not different phenomenological kinds:

³⁹ I defend this account of Spinozist imagination in more detail in my "Spinoza on Imagination and Affect." Not only does this reading make sense of the passages discussed above (especially E2P17S, E3P12), but it also conforms to Spinoza's caution in E2P49S that ideas of objects (i.e. imaginings) are not to be thought of as "mute pictures on a panel."

they are simply different aspects of one experience of the world. As such, no explanation of how they come to be distinguished is required. But there is, of course, a potential cost. For we do want to be able to distinguish our sensations of things from our emotions. Our sensations present us with a world populated by stable objects, and we take our emotions to allow us to assume different attitudes toward them. Spinoza's view would not seem to afford this somewhat intuitive position.

I do think there is a way of retrieving the advantages of the distinction between sensations and emotions without losing the insight of Spinoza's brand of Passionate Perception or falling back on Descartes's somewhat arbitrary distinction. Recognizing our experience of the world as fundamentally affective is to note that our perception, our awareness of things, is shaped by our situation, our relations to other things, and in particular how they impact our continued existence. But we must attend to the complexity of that impact—the multidimensionality of our relations to things, the differentiation in the consistency of those different dimensions—and this complexity can help us to better understand how some aspects of the world appear stable while others ~~but~~ are more variable. It seems to me that Spinoza wants to take a route along this line, but my aim in this paper is not to resolve the problems of Passionate Perception so I will not pursue this further. Rather, I have aimed to highlight a way of thinking about our experience of the world that is importantly different from one that is familiar to us now but which thematized discussions of perception in the late seventeenth century, at least in the work of Descartes and Spinoza.⁴⁰

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