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Abbreviations

I. Works by Spinoza

All quotations from Spinoza’s works in English are taken from Curley’s two-volume *Collected Works of Spinoza* [CWS]; Latin quotations are taken from Gebhardt’s four-volume *Opera* [G]. For each citation, we provide an internal reference to Spinoza’s text using the conventions below, as well as a reference to the CWS volume and page number; when Matheron quotes Spinoza’s Latin, we also provide the G volume and page number.

*Ethics*  *Ethics (Ethica Ordine Geometrico demonstrata et in quinque Partes distincta).* Roman numerals refer to Part number; Arabic numerals refer to Proposition number; further specifications follow the conventions below.

*CM*  *Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts (Cogitata Metaphysica).* The first Roman numeral refers to Part number; the second refers to Chapter number; Arabic numerals refer to line number.

*CWS*  *The Collected Works of Spinoza* (Spinoza 1985–2016). Roman numerals refer to volume number; Arabic numerals refer to page number.

*Ep.*  *Letters (Epistolae).* Roman numerals refer to letter number. Spinoza’s correspondent is given in square brackets.

*G*  *Opera* (Spinoza 1925). Roman numerals refer to volume number; Arabic numerals refer to page number.

*KV*  *Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being (Korte Verhandeling).* Roman numerals refer to chapter number; Arabic numerals refer to section number.

*PP*  *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy (Renati des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae).* Roman numerals refer to Part number; further specifications follow the conventions below.
**ABBREVIATIONS**

*TdIE* *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*). Arabic numerals refer to the section numbers added by Bruder.

*TP* *Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Politicus*). Roman numerals refer to chapter number; Arabic numerals refer to paragraph number.

*TTP* *Theologico-Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*). Roman numerals refer to chapter number; Arabic numerals refer to paragraph number.

**Alt. Dem.** Alternative Demonstration

**App.** Appendix

**Ax.** Axiom

**Cap. #** Chapter

**Cor.** Corollary

**DA #** Definition of the Affects

**Def.** Definition

**Dem.** Demonstration

**Exp.** Explanation

**GDA** General Definition of the Affects

**Lem.** Lemma

**Post.** Postulate

**Praef.** Preface

**Prol.** Prolegomenon

**Schol.** Scholium

**II. Other Works**

**AT** *Œuvres de Descartes* (Descartes 1964–76). Roman numerals refer to volume number; Arabic numerals refer to page number.

**CSM** *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Descartes 1994–95). Roman numerals refer to volume number; Arabic numerals refer to page number.

**DL** *The Discourses on Livy* (Machiavelli 1998a). Roman numerals refer to Book number; Arabic numerals specify first chapter number and then page number.

**L** *Leviathan* (Hobbes 1994). Roman numerals refer to chapter number; Arabic numerals specify first the paragraph numbers added by Molesworth and retained by Curley, and then page numbers.

**P** *The Prince* (Machiavelli 1998b). Roman numerals refer to chapter number; Arabic numerals refer to page number.
ST  *Summa Theologiae* (Aquinas [1911] 1981; 1882–). Roman numerals specify the Part; ‘q’ specifies the Question number and ‘a’ specifies the Article number.

*U*  *Utopia* (More 2002). Arabic numerals refer to page number.
It is the strange fate of once-prolific philosophers to be treated, as Marx lamented of Hegel and Spinoza before him, like a ‘dead dog’. Indeed, it is even stranger, but perhaps not surprising, that the major figures in what has been called a ‘revolution’, or at least a ‘renaissance’, in recent Spinoza scholarship are hardly known beyond erudite circles in their home countries. Skim through the bibliography of any major work on Spinoza in any language from the last fifty years, and one will always find the name of Alexandre Matheron, although his works have almost never been translated, and a broad appreciation of and engagement with his work is still to come in the English-speaking world. The new ‘Spinoza Studies’ series at Edinburgh University Press aims to remedy such conspicuous absences, making the work of important Spinoza scholars newly available for a wide audience. With the publication of this volume we are pleased to introduce a substantial collection of writings by the distinguished Spinoza scholar and historian of philosophy, Alexandre Matheron, to Anglophone readers for the first time.

There can be no doubt that Matheron single-handedly made some of the most significant and profound contributions to Spinoza scholarship of the past 100 years. As Laurent Bove writes, ‘Alexandre Matheron is known, by philosophers and historians of philosophy, as one of the greatest, if not

2 Duffy 2009: 111.
3 Del Lucchese 2009b: 15; see Appendix 2, below.
4 See Barbone 2019.
5 See Peden 2014, which focuses on the importance of Spinozism for the revitalisation of rationalism in twentieth-century French thought against the phenomenological currents. However, as Peden himself admits, Matheron’s work falls outside the scope of his aim, which means that Matheron’s story still remains to be told.
the greatest, commentators on Spinoza’s philosophy.  

His contributions are indeed so significant that Louis Althusser, who was slated to offer a course on Spinoza in 1971–72 for the agrégation de philosophie, decided at the last minute to lecture on Rousseau instead, explicitly imploring his students to read Matheron’s massive 1969 study, Individu et communauté chez Spinoza (Individual and Community in Spinoza); as he went on to explain, Althusser felt that, after Matheron’s intervention, he would have little to offer beyond summarising the book’s main points.  

In a retrospective overview of Matheron’s work written on the occasion of the publication of his most recent book, Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies de l’âge classique (Studies on Spinoza and the Philosophies of Early Modernity), which collects the vast majority of Matheron’s stand-alone essays and from which the essays translated here are drawn, Ariel Suhamy, maître de conférences at the Collège de France, wrote that ‘if all Spinoza’s works were to disappear from the planet, Matheron’s works would happily take their place’.  

Étienne Balibar also speaks to the encyclopaedic scope of Matheron’s work in an amusing anecdote. He recalls that on the day that he defended his habilitation thesis in 1993, Matheron said to him, ‘you read Spinoza as if at every corner of the doctrine you wanted to uncover an aporia and prove that he had put himself in a contradictory situation in which he couldn’t resolve his own problem, and that’s wrong. That’s wrong!’ To this Balibar responded, ‘Not everybody is as capable as you, knowing Spinoza entirely by heart and resolving any difficulty in his doctrine or in the interpretation of his work by finding in a remote corner of a text the phrase that resolves the contradiction.’  

Reading through the essays collected here, one cannot help but sympathise with Balibar’s frustration: Matheron’s approach frequently proceeds by identifying an apparent contradiction or aporia in Spinoza, and, instead of searching somewhere beyond the text, as it were, for its solution, or even, in a kind of deconstructive move, declaring its existence a condition of possibility or impossibility for its systematic coherence, seeks rather to locate and mobilise philosophical resources interior to the doctrine itself that neutralise and displace the contradiction. This in no way means that those who see conflicts and contradictions in Spinoza’s texts are simply mistaken.

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6 Bove 2019: 325.
8 Suhamy 2011.
9 Balibar 1995.
or myopic, but rather that the true problems only arise once these apparent inconsistencies are reformulated on the basis of the authentic Spinozist problematic.\textsuperscript{11} But as Matheron himself says in a 1972 review of the first volume of Gueroult’s studies on Spinoza, ‘how are we to reconstitute problematics if not on the basis of the exact knowledge of systems?’\textsuperscript{12} Matheron’s approach is thus located at the crossroads of the systematic reconstructions of Gueroult and the orientation towards problematics that has come to characterise French rationalism from Bachelard to Deleuze.\textsuperscript{13} And yet Matheron is equally concerned with Spinoza’s continuing relevance for political philosophy, the conditions for the possibility of the historical emergence of Spinozism, and erudite matters of translation and philology.\textsuperscript{14}

At the limit, Matheron’s readings suggest that there simply are no contradictions in Spinoza’s doctrine.\textsuperscript{15} Through his comprehensive and meticulous analyses, such aporetic moments in the philosopher’s corpus seem to dissolve into the systematic consistency of purely immanent rigour. This is not to say that Spinozism is unproblematically complete and consistent, the realised dream of absolute idealism, but rather that Matheron reveals that its seeming lacunae and inconsistencies are not insoluble contradictions or mere oversights. And Matheron always begins within these tensions, at the very heart of these Spinozist problematics, as if he were drawn to their complicated necessity in just the same way as Spinoza himself. As Filippo Del

\textsuperscript{11} See, for example, ‘The “Right of the Stronger”: Hobbes contra Spinoza’, included in this volume as Chapter 18.

\textsuperscript{12} Matheron 1972: 199.

\textsuperscript{13} See Maniglier 2012.

\textsuperscript{14} See, for example, ‘Women and Servants in Spinozist Democracy’, included in this volume as Chapter 17, where Matheron reverses a long-held belief in Spinoza scholarship, based on what he demonstrates to be a translation error, which consisted in the textually unsubstantiated claim that Spinoza considered professions related to ‘vices’, such as the sale of alcohol, to be the kind of ‘servile’ occupations that constitute grounds for formal exclusion from political participation. Matheron’s careful analysis of Spinoza’s Latin reveals that he means just the opposite: servility does not have anything to do with a moral judgement, but involves a relation of dependence; pub owners and wine sellers must count among those who are included in Spinoza’s ideal polities, not among those ruled out from participation. See also Del Lucchese 2009b: 15.

\textsuperscript{15} In this way Matheron’s interpretation stands in sharp contrast with that of one of his predecessors, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, who, in his Introduction à l’histoire de la philosophie (1956), after introducing the basic tenets of Marxist philosophy, goes on to distinguish between the conflicting idealist and materialist tendencies in Spinoza’s thought. As Matheron says in the interview in Appendix 1 below, such a ‘distinguishing’ approach to the history of philosophy had no real interest for him.
Lucchese says, it is rare to encounter a commentator who deeply identifies with the doctrine they study, and precisely this is true of Matheron.\textsuperscript{16}

Alexandre Matheron, born in 1926, began his academic career at the University of Algiers, where he taught from 1957 to 1963. He then moved to Paris, where he worked on his doctoral theses on Spinoza at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique (CNRS) with Martial Gueroult as his sponsor.\textsuperscript{17} From 1968 to 1971, he was an assistant professor at the University of Nanterre in Paris; from 1971 until his retirement in 1992, he was a professor at the École normale supérieure at Fontenay/Saint Cloud. But retirement hardly put a stop to his philosophical and scholarly productivity; for many years afterward, he conducted public seminars on Spinoza, and continued to write, publish and present his original research.

Matheron’s first book was *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (1969), a monumental study of the *Ethics* that was published in Pierre Bourdieu’s influential series *Le sens commun* at Les Éditions de Minuit, and which Antonio Negri once called the most adventurous and fruitful of all the attempts at a structural analysis of the text.\textsuperscript{18} *Individu et communauté* was among the very first sustained readings ever to insist on the centrality of political questions to Spinoza’s philosophical project, and to argue for the novelty of Spinoza’s political thought, which had often been seen either as a liberal contractarianism or a wayward variant of Hobbesian absolutism. Indeed, of the three great French studies on Spinoza that appeared at the end of the 1960s, the Marxist Matheron’s was by far the most political and politically minded; although Gilles Deleuze’s *Expressionism in Philosophy* was crucial for how post-war French philosophers reconceived politics through Spinoza, in itself it was hardly a political text, and Gueroult’s two-volume study on the philosopher is almost obsessively apolitical. One can compare Matheron’s first book with Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason*,\textsuperscript{19} but rewritten on entirely Spinozist bases: it expounds a rigorous synthetic logic of progressive composition and organisation, starting from the *corpora simplicissima* of extended substance and terminating in the transindividual eternal life of the beatific community of Spinozist sages, passing through the

\textsuperscript{16} Del Lucchese 2009b: 9.
\textsuperscript{17} The fact that Gueroult was Matheron’s sponsor at the CNRS should not lead one to overestimate the former’s influence on the latter. See Matheron’s reflections on their relationship in the interview with Bove and Moreau in Appendix 1, below.
\textsuperscript{18} Negri 1991: 245, Note 8.
alienation endemic to political society as it naturally arises among human beings subject to passions and the gradual development of the powers of reason from within those social forms. ‘Beyond the “bourgeois” liberal State and the transitory stage of reasonable interhuman life’, Matheron declares, what the Spinozist sage wants is ‘to establish a communism of minds: to make all of Humanity exist as a self-conscious totality, a microcosm of the infinite Understanding, within which each soul, while remaining entirely itself, would at the same time become all others’. 20 Pierre-François Moreau describes the text as having a double task, which we might even call dialectical: on the one hand, that of deciphering the passions that drive human behaviour in the political Treatises as being essentially those whose genesis is analysed in the Ethics, and on the other hand, that of showing that the key to understanding these passions lies in the social formations and political institutions whose natures are analysed in the Treatises.21

Two years later, Matheron published Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza (Christ and the Salvation of the Ignorant in Spinoza) (1971) in Gueroult’s series Analyse et Raisons with the publisher Aubier-Montaigne, a book which, like Gueroult’s two-volume study, has long been out of print and is nearly impossible to find today. This book is devoted to unravelling some of the most difficult tensions in Spinoza’s Theologico-Political Treatise, which lie precisely at the point of articulation between politics and theology. The initial question that animates the text also gives it its title: how is it possible for Spinoza to consistently hold in the first Tractatus both that the ignorant can achieve salvation by mere obedience, and also that salvation is a matter of knowledge and freedom? Or again: how can we reconcile Spinoza’s absolute rationalism, which is clearly on display in his ruthless criticism of any possible knowledge of God through miracles, with his insistence that the truth of salvation by obedience cannot have been reached by reason, but only through revelation?22 Indeed, what, for Spinoza, was the meaning of Christ, that subversively unarmed prophet who, ‘master par excellence in matters of the third kind of knowledge, was, among finite modes, the one through whose mind the Idea of God was manifest to the highest degree yet attained’?23 Matheron refuses absolutely every easy resolution of these dilemmas, insisting on the consistency of Spinoza’s thought and the simultaneously conceptual and historical necessity of these problems themselves. The

22 See TTP passim, but especially IV and VII.
23 Matheron 1971: 257.
result is an astonishing work of philosophical productivity, which elaborates concepts whose meaning extends well beyond the esoteric scope of its apparent focus; it is a text about historical contingency and necessity, about the concrete logics of ideological diffusion and relapse, about the power of the imagination and the interplay of complex social dynamics in the historical constitution of a truth that aspires to radical universality. As Negri puts it, in this work Matheron shows us how, for Spinoza, ‘the religious problematic of salvation is completely reinterpreted in light of this secular and materialist perspective of liberation’.24

Apart from these two highly original and incisive monographs, Matheron has written over forty scholarly essays from the 1970s to the present day. Many of these were collected in an anthology entitled Anthropologie et politique au XVIIe siècle. Études sur Spinoza (Anthropology and Politics in the Seventeenth Century: Studies on Spinoza) (1986); that collection was greatly expanded and revised twenty-five years later as the massive Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies de l’âge classique (2011). It is from these Études that the essays in the present volume were selected. In making our selection, initially based on that of Filippo Del Lucchese,25 we strove to compile a representative sample of Matheron’s extremely broad research. We think that the volume succeeds in this regard, and that it thus constitutes an excellent introduction to Matheron’s work – a better introduction, perhaps, than either of his standalone monographs. The reader should be aware, however, that this volume leaves out fully half of the forty pieces gathered in the Études. And there are, in addition, a number of occasional texts that Matheron composed that are included neither in the Études nor in the present volume; for a complete list of Matheron’s published works, see the appended chronology.

We have chosen to organise the chapters in this volume thematically. The first set of essays is grouped under the title ‘Spinoza on Ontology and Knowledge’. They concern what might seem to be relatively traditional problems of metaphysics and epistemology: the inherently reflexive nature of ideas in Spinoza from his earliest to his most mature works (Ch. 1); the progressive development of Spinoza’s immanent metaphysics of power and its relation to physics (Chs. 2–4); and the notoriously difficult concepts of eternal life and the intellectual love of God in Part V of the Ethics (Chs. 5 and 6). Even at this ostensibly abstract metaphysical level, Matheron’s reading of Spinoza has important political overtones; as Matheron himself

25 See Matheron 2009.
notes in the interview appended to this volume, he thought that ‘Spinozist eternity prefigured the life of a militant, which seemed to me to be the best example of the adequation of our existence to our essence’.26

The second, much larger, set of essays are grouped under the title ‘Spinoza on Politics and Ethics’. There is significant thematic overlap across nearly all of these chapters, but they can be provisionally broken into smaller groupings that share a specific focus. Chapters 7 through 11 involve Matheron’s reading of Spinoza’s injunction, in the first chapter of the Political Treatise, that we must ‘seek the causes and natural foundations of the state, not from the teachings of reason, but from the common nature, or condition, of men’.27 As Matheron repeatedly emphasises, this means: on the basis of passive affects. Indeed in these chapters we find one of Matheron’s most original contributions, what he sometimes refers to as the ‘four fundamental affects’: pity, envy, the ambition for glory and the ambition for domination.28 As he demonstrates, these all follow from the imitation of the affects, even in a hypothetical (and hyperbolic) ‘state of nature’, and give rise to each other in an endless cycle spurred on by indignation; and this, he argues, is itself sufficient to account for the de facto establishment of a democratic imperium and the formation of political society. This innovative reading allows Matheron to maintain that Spinoza develops a radically non-contractarian account of the genesis of the civil state, and without even needing to make recourse to any utilitarian calculus on the part of any individuals. But the crucial role played by indignation in this story also, as he is keen to emphasise, entails that there is something ineradicably evil (in Spinoza’s technical sense of the term) at the basis of all political societies, a normatively operative mechanism of repression and a social foundation of irreducible hatred, following Machiavelli and perhaps anticipating certain Nietzschean and Freudian insights. In this way, Matheron’s sober analyses might serve as a helpful corrective to those who see in Spinoza a purely affirmative politics of joyful becoming, untainted by any negativity.29

Matheron’s analysis of the nature of Spinozist politics continues in the next few chapters, which deal with the ontological status of two particular

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26 Appendix 1, below; see Stolze 2015.
27 TP I, 7; CWS II, 506.
28 Spinoza himself typically writes about ‘Ambition’ [ambitio] without qualification; rigorously distinguishing between these two modalities of ambition is part of Matheron’s interpretative innovation.
29 See Del Lucchese 2009b: 16. In this regard, Del Lucchese’s Conflict, Power, and Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza: Tumult and Indignation constitutes a profoundly Matheronian analysis (Del Lucchese 2009a).
and potentially surprising things: the state itself (Ch. 12), and holy Scripture (Ch. 13). Both of these, Matheron convincingly argues, qualify as individuals, in Spinoza’s precise sense of individuality, assuming that certain important external conditions are met. And in affirming the ontological individuality of the state and scripture, Matheron recapitulates some important themes from his earlier monographs: they must each be understood as having their own proper conatus, and his analysis opens onto questions concerning the relative autonomy of social and ideological production and reproduction conceived as concrete historical processes. Next, Chapter 14, originally written for the journal of the French Communist Party, La Nouvelle Critique, recapitulates all these political reflections in a sweeping, speculative account that plays out the immanent genesis of political society, its attendant alienation, and the potential surpassing of the bleak horizons of the modern state-form by the powers of reason, all from the perspective of Spinoza’s theory of power and in a more overtly Marxist vernacular than Matheron typically speaks.

The next few chapters bear on specific ‘problems’ in Spinoza’s political and anthropological reflections. In these essays, Matheron takes up Spinoza’s relation to the seventeenth-century theory of property (Ch. 15), the question of sexuality in his systematic philosophy (Ch. 16), and his excluding women and servants from participation in the democratic state he envisages (Ch. 17). Matheron cautions us not to move so quickly in condemning Spinoza on these matters from our own historical position, from which they may seem obviously regressive and indefensible, but also refuses to excuse his positions as mere ‘products of their time’. Instead his analyses seek to explain how and why Spinoza saw these positions as genuinely consistent, if troubling, consequences of his philosophical approach to political and ethical life under conditions in which reason clearly does not have the upper hand over the passions, which so forcefully determine the desires and behaviour of the vast majority of human beings.

The remaining chapters might be described as comparative studies. In them we find Matheron contrasting Spinoza and Hobbes on the subject of the relation between power and right, in which he argues that Rousseau’s famous critique of the ‘right of the stronger’ misses the mark in both cases but for opposite reasons (Ch. 18). And he also contrasts them on the subject of democracy, arguing that Hobbes’ elaboration of the concept of authorisation in his account of the social contract, between De Cive and Leviathan, was designed to displace the theoretical primacy that his earlier work had unwittingly granted to democratic sovereignty – a primacy that Spinoza unequivocally affirms (Ch. 19). The last chapter (Ch. 20) constitutes a long
and complex argument for the theoretical novelty of Spinozist political philosophy, which, Matheron claims, is the first to escape the double bind of banal positivism and futile idealism that haunted all approaches from Saint Thomas Aquinas up through Hobbes. But this account has a historical-materialist twist: if, according to Matheron, Spinoza was able to circumvent this impasse in theory, it is only because the actual political practices of the Machiavellians (not, that is, the works of Machiavelli himself) had first made it possible to grasp the true nature of this problem.

The final text in our volume is an interview of Alexandre Matheron by two of his most prominent students, who today are major Spinoza scholars in their own right: Laurent Bove and Pierre-François Moreau. Their lively conversation spans from Matheron’s own intellectual formation in the first half of the twentieth century to the major themes of his research and its influences, and will undoubtedly give the reader a sense of Matheron’s remarkable humility and cheerful sense of humour.

This volume is, we hope, only the first of many that will bring Matheron’s influential and excellent scholarship on Spinoza and early modern philosophy to an Anglophone audience. Matheron’s work has been absolutely essential and formative for the entire development of what today is sometimes called French Spinozism; we are confident that, in the following pages, you will easily be able to understand why.
I

Spinoza on Ontology and Knowledge
When we compare what Spinoza says about the relations between the idea and the idea of the idea in the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* with what he says about them in Part II of the *Ethics*, we get the impression, at first glance, that there are a number of contradictions between these two texts.¹ Indeed,

1. In Paragraph 33 of the *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*, Spinoza claims that an idea can be the object of another idea. With Propositions 20 and 22 of Part II, by contrast, he demonstrates that there is necessarily an idea of every idea. This, however, is not exactly an insurmountable contradiction. For, after all, what is necessary is *a fortiori* possible. And in order to prove, inversely, that the existence of an idea of the idea corresponding to each idea is not simply possible, but also necessary, we must presuppose the whole of Spinoza’s ontology: the definition and the existence of God, the unicity of substance, the parallelism of attributes, etc. But none of this would have been available to readers of the *TdIE*: the goal of that work is, on the contrary, to lead readers, from wherever they might be, to the progressive discovery of the premises of Spinozist ontology, which consequently cannot be posited at the outset. Generally speaking, the mere absence of a claim found in the *Ethics* from the *TdIE* proves nothing.

2. There is, however, a more serious contradiction. In Paragraphs 33 and 34 of the *TdIE*, Spinoza insists that the idea of the idea is something other than the idea of which it is the idea. In the Scholium to Proposition 21 of Part II of the *Ethics*, by contrast, he demonstrates that the idea and the

¹ [Originally published as ‘Idée, idée d'idée et certitude dans le *Tractatus de intellectus emendatione* et dans l’*Éthique*’, *Travaux et documents*, no. 2: Méthode et Métaphysique, Groupe de recherches spinozistes (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1989); republished in Matheron 2011. (See Appendix 2.)]
idea of the idea are in reality one and the same thing. And yet, this is perhaps not a formal contradiction either. For two things can be one under a certain relation, all the while remaining distinct under a different relation. And that this is the case here is confirmed by the very demonstration that Spinoza gives of the identity between the idea and the idea of the idea. The Scholium to Proposition 21, indeed, is based explicitly upon the Scholium to Proposition 7, where it was established that a body and the idea of this body are one and the same thing under two different attributes – which we can generalise by saying that an idea and its ideatum, each in its attribute, are the same thing. Now the ideatum of the idea of the idea, is indeed the idea, but it is the idea considered only under a certain aspect: it is the idea considered only in its formal essence, and not at all in its objective reality. Thus the idea of the idea, as is made clear in this same Scholium to Proposition 21, is identical (this time under the same attribute) to the idea considered as a ‘form of the idea’, as ‘a mode of thinking, without relation to the object’;\(^2\) but it is not wrong to say that it is distinguished, at least by a distinction of reason, from the idea considered in its representative content, or from the idea to the extent that it is the ‘objective essence’ of something. Moreover, the doctrine of the identity of the idea and the idea of the idea (in the same way, moreover, as that of the identity of the idea and its ideatum) is only laid out in the scholia, which leads us to a more elevated level of ‘intuitive science’ than that of the rest of the Ethics: if we consider only the propositions of Part II and their demonstrations, absolutely nothing yet allows us to decide if the series of ideas and that of the ideas of ideas (or the series of ideas and that of bodies) are one and the same series, or two simply parallel but distinct series. We understand then that Spinoza did not – assuming (since this has not been proven either) that, beginning in this period, Spinoza had been in possession of, on this point, his definitive doctrine – give an account, in the TdIE, of something that in the Ethics would still be a bit esoteric with respect to the demonstrative apparatus properly speaking.

3. There is, however, an even more serious contradiction. In the TdIE, Spinoza indeed seems to say that there is not even parallelism between the idea and the idea of the idea. In fact, in Paragraph 34, he concludes his analysis of the relations between the idea and the idea of the idea by announcing two theses:

– Thesis number 1: ‘In order to know, it is not necessary to know that I know.’

\(^{2}\) Ethics II, 21 Schol.; CWS I, 467–8.
– Thesis number 2: ‘In order to know that I know, it must first (prius) be necessary that I know.’

Spinoza thus seems to say that it is possible to know without knowing that we know: he seems to think that we first (prius) know, and that then, depending on the case, we become aware of whether or not we know; that we first have a true idea, and that then, depending on the case, the true idea of this true idea does or does not make an appearance. Now, in the Ethics, Proposition 43 of Part II is formal: whoever has a true idea knows at the same time that they have a true idea; it is thus not possible to know without knowing that we know, and the knowledge of knowing is strictly contemporaneous with knowledge itself. Is the contradiction not blatant this time?

Perhaps not, in spite of everything. In fact, concerning thesis number 1, we could note that Spinoza actually does not say that it is possible to know without knowing that we know. All that this thesis means, if we put it in context, is that our knowledge of what the nature of a thing is does not depend in any way, with respect to its content, on premises taken from the knowledge of what the nature of our knowledge of this thing is. Taking the example given by Spinoza in this same Paragraph 34, all that I can ever understand of the essence of Peter will come to me exclusively from my true idea of the essence of Peter, without my true idea of my true idea of the essence of Peter ever being able to afford me any complementary information on this point; for the idea of a thing and the idea of this idea have two different ideata, and an idea, generally speaking, will never lead us to know anything other than its own ideatum. Put differently, epistemology is not a part of science. But this does not necessarily mean that it is possible that we can know without knowing that we know: what is established is that if this is impossible, it is not because of a so-called logical dependence of the idea with respect to the idea of the idea; but perhaps it is impossible for other reasons. Simply put, in the TdIE, Spinoza does not weigh in on the question and does not even pose it, whereas in the Ethics he will respond to it negatively.

Under these conditions, concerning thesis number 2, we might, if need be, think that the adverb prius has a purely logical signification, and not at all a chronological one. This thesis might, if need be, mean: ‘In order to know that I know what a thing is, it is necessary that I know what this thing is, and that I know it by means of knowledge that does not depend at all upon any knowledge of knowledge whatsoever.’ And, to be sure, it also means this. But ultimately, the fact remains that there would be something artificial about reducing it to this: this would be to force the meaning of the

3 TdIE, 34; CWS I, 17.
words a bit. And anyway, this reduction is ruled out by what immediately follows.

Indeed, in Paragraph 35, Spinoza applies what he has just said to the problem of *certainty*. He says: ‘From this it is clear that certainty is nothing but the objective essence itself’ (put differently, the idea); and he clarifies: ‘i.e., the mode by which we are aware of the formal essence (*modus, quo sentiumus essentiam formalem*) is certainty itself’. 4 Spinoza does not demonstrate this explicitly: he simply says that it is obvious based on the preceding. Now, if we accept that the idea and the idea of the idea are necessarily contemporaneous, we do not at all see how this conclusion would be immediately clear: all that we could immediately conclude from the preceding is that there are ideas, ideas of ideas, ideas of ideas of ideas, etc., in our mind, and that certainty is situated at one of these levels; but there would not be any reason, it seems, to identify it more specifically with the idea rather than with the idea of the idea – or, if there is such a reason, we would not see it at first glance. Whereas, by contrast, if we accept that there is a *chronological* anteriority of the idea with respect to the idea of the idea, then, as a matter of fact, this localisation of certainty at the level of the idea directly and immediately follows from the conjunction of theses 1 and 2.

Indeed,

1. let us suppose that certainty is situated at the level of the idea of the idea, and not at the level of the idea. And let us accept that it is possible to have a true idea before having the true idea of this true idea. In this case, we would be able, *in a first moment*, to know, for example, that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles, but without yet being certain of it: we would be able to, put differently, represent to ourselves the triangle as necessarily having the sum of its angles equal to two right angles, with the demonstration complete and perfectly understood, but we might ask ourselves if the impossibility of thinking the contrary truly proves that the contrary is impossible in itself. And this would only be, *in a second moment*, after the appearance of the idea of the idea, that is to say, after an epistemological examination of our idea of the triangle would have made us understand that it possesses all of the characteristics of a true idea, that we would become certain that the sum of the angles of the triangle is equal to two right angles and it is impossible that it be otherwise. But if this were the case, it is clear that the passage from the first moment to the second

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4 *TdeI*, 35; *CWS* I, 18. The Pléiade edition, following Koyré, translates this as: ‘the way in which we sense [sentons] the formal essence’. 
moment would have afforded us new knowledge concerning the triangle: to learn that a thing is in conformity with the idea that we have of it is to gain access to information relative to the thing itself, and not to its idea. Now this would be in contradiction with the first thesis: it is impossible that my true idea of my true idea of the triangle would afford me any information whatsoever about the triangle, because the triangle is not its ideatum: all that this allows me to know is the nature of my true idea of the triangle, and its nature such as it already was before I even knew in what it consisted. Thus, in reality, the only new thing that my idea of the idea makes me understand is that my idea of the triangle, and it alone, made me understand by itself that the sum of the angles of the triangle can only be equal to two right angles. But then,

2. since our true idea of the triangle did not change between the first and second moment, we have to admit that, from the first moment, before the appearance of the idea of the idea, it already made us really understand, by itself, and itself alone, that the sum of the angles of the triangle is really equal to the sum of two right angles. For if this was not the case, this would be in contradiction with the second thesis: we would have a true idea of a true idea that would teach us that we knew from the first moment what in reality we did not yet know, and consequently, by giving us false information, would not be true. Thus, we must indeed conclude that our true idea, from the first moment, really involved, on its own, certainty at its own level.

But this quasi-immediate demonstration, if I have reconstructed it correctly, clearly presupposes the possibility of a distinction between two successive moments, and consequently the possibility of a chronological anteriority of the idea with respect to the idea of the idea. Is not the TdIE, this time around, in contradiction with the Ethics, which affirms, on the contrary, the impossi- bility of such an anteriority? No, in fact, it is not. And what proves this is that in the Ethics itself, immediately after having demonstrated with Proposition 43 that the idea and the idea of the idea are strictly contemporaneous, Spinoza gives us, in the Scholium to this same Proposition 43, a new demonstration of the identity between idea and certainty. And in this demonstration, which is nearly identical to the one in the TdIE, the word prius appears following an explanation intended to justify its use in a chronological sense. If there was thus a contradiction on this point between the TdIE and the Ethics, there would also be a contradiction between two passages in the Ethics that immediately follow one another; this is hardly feasible. But in reality, there is no contradiction, as we will see by analysing these two passages.
First of all, Proposition 43 tells us that ‘He who has a true idea at the same time knows that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt the truth of the thing.’ And the demonstration is strictly ‘parallelist’: it amounts to saying that, when we have an adequate idea, we necessarily have at the same time an adequate idea of this adequate idea, that is to say, an idea of the idea that makes us adequately know the truth of our true idea, and that consequently (‘since it is self-evident’) we are certain of this truth. This demonstration is perfectly convincing, and it establishes exactly what it is intended to establish. But this, however, is not the best possible demonstration, since it risks, precisely, making us think that certainty is situated uniquely at the level of the idea of the idea. Spinoza does not say this, since it would be false: he simply says that, if there is a true idea of the true idea, it is clear that there is also certainty (and we can understand by this that there is certainty a fortiori), without this sufficient condition being presented as being at the same time a necessary condition. But nor does he say explicitly that the true idea involves certainty by itself, insofar as it is an idea of the first degree, and that it is not the idea of the idea that renders it certain. And this is why, in the Scholium that follows, he feels the need to rectify this false impression.

In the first sentence of the Scholium of Proposition 43, Spinoza simply puts us on the path: ‘In II, 21 schol.’, he tells us, ‘I have explained what the idea of the idea is.’ Since the Scholium in question had established that the idea of the idea is nothing other than the very form of the idea, it clearly follows that, even if we identify certainty with the idea of the idea, we must conclude all the same – since this is the same thing – that it is also identical with the idea. But this does not suffice; for, if we remained there, we might still think that certainty is identical to the idea considered only under its aspect ‘idea of itself’ (or reflexive idea), and not under its aspect ‘idea of something’. What follows sets things straight.

In what follows in the Scholium to Proposition 43, Spinoza in fact tells us that, independently of any recourse to parallelism, independently even of any recourse to a distinction of reason between idea and idea of the idea, the preceding proposition is obvious on its own: whoever has a true idea is, by this fact alone, certain of its truth. And though this is self-evident, Spinoza nevertheless gives us a two-part demonstration of it that very closely resembles the one that we can detect in the TdIE, simply with two additions. The first part of this demonstration consists in establishing, as in the TdIE, that, to the extent that there is certainty at the level of the idea of the idea,

5 Ethics II, 43; CWS I, 479.
6 Ethics II, 43 Schol.; CWS I, 479.
this certainty can consist only in the knowledge of the fact that the idea, by itself, insofar as it is as an idea of the first degree, already involves certainty at its own level. Simply put, Spinoza here adds two supplementary clarifications that had not appeared in the TdIE: he indicates, on the one hand, that we always have this knowledge, at least implicitly, from the mere fact that we have a true idea; and he explains, on the other hand, the reason for which we might have the illusory psychological impression of not having this knowledge, or of not having always had it – whereas, in the TdIE, by contrast, he did not explicitly eliminate the hypothesis according to which, in a first moment, we would not have really had this knowledge, the idea of the idea perhaps appearing after the idea. But, abstracting from these two clarifications, this first part of the demonstration is based upon a principle equivalent to the first thesis of the TdIE. As for the second part of the demonstration, it is absolutely identical to the one that we can detect in the TdIE and is based explicitly upon the second thesis. Let us take a look then at these two parts.

The first part consists in the statement and the demonstration of the following thesis: ‘For no one who has a true idea is unaware that a true idea involves the highest certainty.’ And this thesis is demonstrated in two steps.

In the first step, Spinoza tells us: ‘For to have a true idea means nothing other than knowing a thing perfectly, or in the best way.’ Spinoza, it is indeed worth mentioning, does not yet tell us that the true idea is perfect knowledge of the thing; he simply tells us that the concept ‘true idea’ means the same thing, or has the same content, as that of ‘perfect knowledge’: when we think an idea is true, we think at the same time that it gives us knowledge of its ideatum that is lacking nothing, that it is knowledge that has no need to be completed by something else – and above all not by knowledge of knowledge (which is indeed equivalent to thesis 1). Now to know a thing perfectly, means, in particular, knowing that the real nature of this thing cannot be other than how we conceive it; for if we did not know this, our knowledge of the thing would precisely not be ‘perfect’: there would be something essential missing from it. From this we can in fact conclude that the concept of perfect knowledge implies the concept of certainty, and that consequently the concept of the true idea implies it as well. But this applies only, evidently, if there is indeed an equivalence between the concept of true idea and the concept of perfect knowledge. But is this equivalence really

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
justified? Yes, despite how it may appear. And this is what the second step shows.

In the second step Spinoza in fact tells us: ‘And of course no one can doubt this’ (that is, the equivalence between the concept of true idea and the concept of perfect knowledge) ‘unless he thinks that an idea is something mute, like a picture on a tablet, and not a mode of thinking, viz. the very [act of] understanding (ipsum intelligere).’ Let us analyse this rather complex argument.

1. It is impossible to doubt that, generally speaking, ‘to have a true idea’ means the same thing as ‘to know perfectly’, at least if we accept that ‘to have a true idea’ means ‘to understand’; since it is evident, and everybody knows, that ‘to understand’ means ‘to know perfectly’. Consequently,

2. whoever has such a particular true idea can only doubt having perfect knowledge of the corresponding thing if they do not recognise this true idea for what it is, that is, as an act of intellection. For beginning from the moment that they think: ‘I understand this thing’, they will necessarily think: ‘I know this thing perfectly.’ But,

3. in reality, whoever has a true idea cannot completely overlook that it is an act of intellection (they know this implicitly, at least), for we cannot understand without being more or less conscious of understanding at the precise moment when we understand. And consequently, whoever has a true idea cannot truly doubt that they understand the thing perfectly, and thus cannot truly doubt being certain. However,

4. there are people who doubt psychologically, or who believe they doubt, that they perfectly know the thing of which they have a true idea. If this is the case, though they know that their true idea is an intellection, the doubt arises from what obscures or covers over this knowledge, or relegates it to the back of their mind, by an imaginative prejudice concerning the nature of the idea in general. That is, they have a true idea of their true idea, which made them understand it as being an act of intellection, but they have at the same time an idea of an imaginative idea that represents to them the idea in general as being something analogous to a picture on a tablet – because, in their mind, the imagination of the word ‘idea’ is associated with the imagination of a tablet, and because, in their body, the auditory image of the word ‘idea’ is associated with the visual image of a tablet. And since these two ideas are concurrent with one another, they doubt psychologically: they oscillate between two contradictory affirmations, according to whichever of these two ideas of ideas happens to prevail in their mind. And this is why it might be

⁹ Ibid.
the case that these people, *in a first moment*, ask themselves if this tablet that they have in their mind is truly in conformity with the original: this is exactly the type of question that we can ask ourselves of a tablet. But in reality, even in this first moment, it is never directly concerning their true idea that they pose this question to themselves: they pose it to themselves concerning the tablet that they imagine more or less vaguely and that they call ‘idea’, and they apply it to their true idea externally when they do not truly have it present in their mind – whereas on the contrary, when they truly think of it (when they pay attention to it), they cease to doubt. And consequently,

5. it is indeed clear that if, *in a second moment*, an epistemological reflection on the nature of their true idea allows them to eliminate their prejudice (by unknotting the associative link that unites the word ‘idea’ to the representation of a tablet), these people will know explicitly what they already knew implicitly. They will not need to acquire any new knowledge for this: simply, the disappearance of their prejudice (in their body as well as in their soul) will make what they already knew (‘I understand this’) pass to a more elevated degree of consciousness.

Thus, finally, the initial thesis is well established: whoever has a true idea knows that this true idea involves certainty at its own level; but on the condition that we clarify that this knowledge can enter into contradiction in our mind with imaginative prejudices that lead us to psychologically doubt it and that might even push it to the background of our field of consciousness, and that it is only with the disappearance of these prejudices that knowledge becomes explicit. But then can we immediately conclude that the true idea, by itself, really makes us certain? In the case where prejudices have disappeared, certainly. But in the case where they have not yet disappeared, it is less clear: if we only know implicitly, and by doubting it psychologically, that we are certain, can we truly say that we have already attained certainty? Can we be certain when we still doubt, psychologically, that we are certain? Yes, actually; and this is what the second part of the demonstration is going to show.

Spinoza formulates the second part of the demonstration in the following way:

And I ask, who can know that he understands some thing unless he first (*prius*) understands it? I.e., who can know that he is certain about some thing unless he is first (*prius*) certain about it?10

10 Ibid. As a result, no doubt, of a typographical error, the Pléiade translation is incomprehensible here.
Now here thesis number 2 of the *TdIE* is reproduced verbatim, including the word *prius*, which is repeated twice: in order to know that we know, we must first know. That is indeed the same reasoning that we find here. Let us suppose, Spinoza says, that I first had prejudices about the nature of the idea and that I have now rid myself of them: I now know explicitly that my true idea is an intellection and that it thus involves certainty. This knowledge that I now have is clearly true knowledge. But it can only be so if my true idea is really an intellection, and if it thus really involves certainty. Now my true idea, in itself, has not changed between the moment when I fell victim to my prejudices, and the moment when I was delivered from them: what changed is only its imaginative context, with the disappearance of the associative link between the word ‘idea’ and the representation of a tablet; but, in itself, it remains what it was. We must thus accept that my true idea, in itself, already involved certainty at its own level before I even explicitly knew that this certainty was involved. From this it follows that it involves certainty by nature, insofar as it is an idea of the first degree, independent of what it might teach us additionally insofar as it is a reflexive idea.

Thus, in fact, I would not be able to know explicitly that I am certain if I had not first, literally, been certain. And in this way, we come to understand the word *prius*, including in a chronological sense. To be sure, *prius* also has a logical sense (‘independent of any idea of the idea’); but at the same time it means: ‘Even before the disappearance of the imaginative prejudice that gave me the illusory psychological impression of not knowing if I was certain or not, and whose dissipation gave me the illusory psychological impression that I am only just now beginning to know that I was certain.’

Thus, finally, there is not a contradiction between the *TdIE* and the *Ethics*. In the *TdIE*, Spinoza sticks to immediate appearances: he does not explicitly eliminate the hypothesis according to which knowledge of knowledge could be posterior to knowledge; perhaps, moreover, he still accepts it, but this remains undecidable. In the *Ethics*, by contrast, Spinoza demonstrates, based on his doctrine of parallelism (of which he could not in any case give an account in the *TdIE*), that when we know, we know that we know. But immediately afterward, the Scholium to Proposition 43 shows how it is possible, without compromising the parallelism in any way, to give an account of these immediate appearances that the *TdIE* stuck to: he explains the reason for which we can perfectly imagine ourselves to have first had a true idea and only later the true idea of this true idea. In reality, we have the idea of the idea from the beginning, since it is nothing other than the idea itself insofar as it necessarily reflects its own formal reality; but its degree of consciousness insofar as it is an idea of an idea was weaker
than its degree of consciousness insofar as it was an idea, because it runs up against the imaginative prejudices related to the nature of the idea in general; whereas, by contrast, when these imaginative prejudices are dissipated, its degree of consciousness insofar as it is an idea of the idea can become equal – or at least tends to become equal – to the degree of consciousness it has insofar as it is an idea. Put differently, the idea and the idea of the idea are indeed contemporaneous (since they are one and the same thing), but there can be a chronological delay [décalage] between the idea and the idea of the idea attaining their maximal degree of perfection; for the true idea of the true idea only attains its highest degree of perfection after the modification of the imaginative context of the true idea itself. And this is precisely why method always comes after science, even if it in turn allows science to progress.