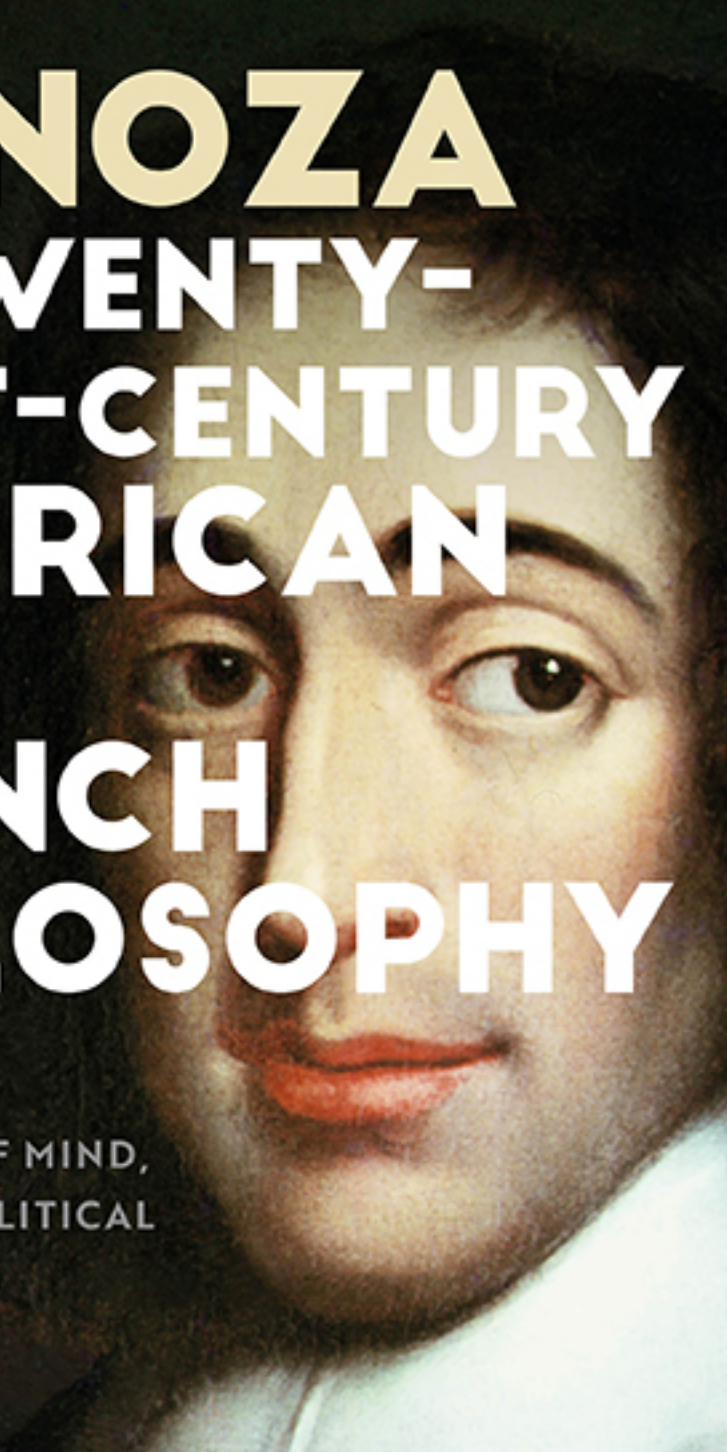


EDITED BY  
JACK STETTER AND CHARLES RAMOND

A close-up portrait of Baruch Spinoza, showing his face from the nose up. He has dark hair, a high forehead, and a slight smile. The background is dark and textured.

# SPINOZA IN TWENTY- FIRST-CENTURY AMERICAN AND FRENCH PHILOSOPHY

METAPHYSICS,  
PHILOSOPHY OF MIND,  
MORAL AND POLITICAL  
PHILOSOPHY

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# Spinoza in Twenty-First-Century American and French Philosophy

Metaphysics, Philosophy of Mind,  
Moral and Political Philosophy

Edited by  
Jack Stetter and Charles Ramond

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## About this Book

Seeing that both American and French approaches to Spinoza were particularly strong, it appeared to us that the time had come to bring them into discussion with one another. Broadly speaking, the volume's contents can be grouped into four categories, each of which corresponds to a major domain in Spinoza's philosophy: metaphysics, philosophy of mind, moral philosophy, and political philosophy. Each paper by an English-speaking philosopher is followed by a commentary by a French-speaking philosopher. The papers themselves are bold and rigorous statements in Spinoza scholarship, some of which are sure to elicit much further commentary down the line, hopefully on both sides of the Atlantic. The commentaries give the English-speaking reader a novel opportunity to discover the exciting state of Spinoza scholarship in France.

Under the heading of **Metaphysics**, we include five papers with five commentaries: (1) **Edwin Curley's** paper, "Spinoza's Metaphysics Revisited," followed by **Pierre-François Moreau's** response, "On Spinoza, Possible Worlds, and Pantheism"; (2) **Michael Della Rocca's** paper, "The Elusiveness of the One and the Many in Spinoza: Substance, Attribute, and Mode," followed by **Pascal Sévérac's** response, "In What Way It Exists"; (3) **Yitzhak Y. Melamed's** paper, "The Earliest Draft of Spinoza's *Ethics*," followed by **Mogens Lærke's** response, "Accidents and Modifications: An Additional Note on Axioms 1 and 2 in Appendix 1 of the *Short Treatise*"; (4) **Martin Lin's** paper, "Metaphysical Rationalism," followed by **Valérie Debuiche's** response, "Leibniz's Principle of (Sufficient) Reason and Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles"; and (5) **Simon B. Duffy's** paper, "The Transformation of Relations in Spinoza's Metaphysics," followed by **Céline Hervet's** response, "Essence, Variations in Power, and 'Becoming Other' in Spinoza."

Under the heading of **Philosophy of Mind**, we include three papers with three commentaries: (1) **Alison Peterman's** paper, "Spinoza's Two Claims about the Mind-Body Relation," followed by **Jack Stetter's** response, "A Puzzle in Spinoza's Views on the Mind-Body Problem"; (2) **Knox Peden's** paper, "Spinoza's True Ideas: Suggestive Convergences," followed by **Pascale Gillot's** response, "Althusser, Spinoza, and the Specter of the Cartesian Subject"; and (3) **Michael A. Rosenthal's** paper, "Spinoza on Beings of Reason [*Entia Rationis*] and the Analogical Imagination," followed by **Jacqueline Lagrée's** response, "*Analogia* and *Ens Rationis*."

Under the heading of **Moral Philosophy**, we group two papers with two commentaries: (1) **Steven Nadler**'s paper, "Spinoza on Good and Bad," followed by **Lorenzo Vinciguerra**'s response, "The Knowledge of Good and Bad"; and (2) **Hasana Sharp**'s paper, "Generosity as Freedom in Spinoza's *Ethics*," followed by **Ariel Suhamy**'s response, "A Generous Reading."

Lastly, under the heading of **Political Philosophy** we group the three remaining papers and their commentaries: (1) **Daniel Garber**'s paper, "Anthropomorphism, Teleology, and Superstition: The Politics of Obedience in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*," followed by **Chantal Jaquet**'s response, "Logic of the Superstitious, Logic of the Pious"; (2) **Steven Barbone**'s paper, "*Individual and Community* and Its American Legacy," followed by **Laurent Bove**'s response, "Between Matheron and Spinoza, Something Happens ..."; and (3) **Jonathan Israel**'s paper, "Spinoza's Formulation of the Radical Enlightenment's Two Defining Doctrines: How Much Did He Owe to the Dutch Golden Age Theological-Political Context?," followed by **Charles Ramond**'s response, "Spinoza's Paradoxical Radicalism."

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# Abbreviations and Citations

## Editions of Spinoza's Works

- C Curley, Edwin. *The Collected Works of Spinoza*. 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985 and 2016). So, "C I 371, l. 22" means the twenty-second line of the 371st page of the first volume of Curley's *The Collected Works of Spinoza*.
- G Gebhardt, Carl. *Spinoza opera*. 4 vols (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1925). So, "G IV 117, l. 1" means the first line of the 117th page of the fourth volume of Gebhardt's *Spinoza opera*.

Unless otherwise indicated, all English-language translations of Spinoza are taken from Curley's *The Collected Works of Spinoza*.

## *The Ethics*

Citations from Spinoza's *Ethics* [*Ethica*] use the following abbreviations:

a	axiom
app	appendix
c	corollary
d	definition (when not following a proposition number)
d	demonstration (when following a proposition number)
da	definition of the affects (located at the end of <i>Ethics</i> part 3)
ex	explanation
le	lemma (located after <i>Ethics</i> 2p13)
p	proposition
po	postulate
pr	preface
s	scholium

So, “E1p33s2” means the second scholium of proposition thirty-three of the first part of the *Ethics*, and “E2p43d” means the demonstration of the forty-third proposition of the second part of the *Ethics*.

## Other Works by Spinoza

CGLH—*Compendium of Hebrew Grammar* [*Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae*]

CM—*Metaphysical Thoughts* [*Cogitata Metaphysica*]

DPP—*Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy* [*Renati des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I & II*]

Ep.—*Letters* [*Epistolae*]

KV—*Short Treatise on God, Man, and His Well-Being* [*Korte Verhandeling van God, de Mensch en des zelfs Welstand*]

TIE—*Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* [*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*]

TP—*Political Treatise* [*Tractatus Politicus*]

TTP—*Theological-Political Treatise* [*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*]

Citations of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* are by the paragraph number introduced originally in Bruder’s edition (1843–1846, Leipzig) of Spinoza’s works. So, “TIE, §40” means the fortieth paragraph of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*.

Citations of the *Political Treatise* and the *Theological-Political Treatise* are by chapter number, then by paragraph number, again following the Bruder edition. So, “TTP, ch. iv, §4” means the fourth paragraph of the fourth chapter of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, and “TP, ch. ii, §3” means the third paragraph of the second chapter of the *Political Treatise*.

Citations of the *Metaphysical Thoughts* and the *Short Treatise* are by part, then by chapter, then by paragraph number, again following the Bruder edition. So, “KV, II, ch. v, §6” means the sixth paragraph of the fifth chapter of the second part of the *Short Treatise*, and “CM I, ch. i, §1” means the first paragraph of the first chapter of the first part of the *Metaphysical Thoughts*.

## Editions of Descartes' Works

- CSM(K) Cottingham, John, Stoothoff, Robert, and Murdoch, Dugald (and Kenny, Anthony, for vol. 3 only). *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, 1985, and 1991). So, "CSMK III 52" means the fifty-second page of the third volume of Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, and Kenny's *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*.
- AT Adam, Charles and Tannery, Paul. *Œuvres de Descartes*, 13 vols (Paris: Vrin, 1996 revised centennial edn). So, "AT III 692 23" means line twenty-three of the 692nd page of the third volume of Adam and Tannery's *Œuvres de Descartes*.

## Editions of Leibniz's Works

- A *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1923–). References include series, volume, and page. So, "A VI.4.1394" means series 6, volume 4, page 1394.
- AG *Philosophical Essays*, ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989).
- GP *Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. K. I. Gerhardt, 7 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1875–1890).
- L *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. Leroy E. Loemker, 2nd edn (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1976).
- LC Leibniz's letters to Samuel Clarke. From G VII, 352–420, cited by letter (L is for letters by Leibniz and C is for letters by Clarke) and section number. So, "LC L 5.2" means Leibniz–Clarke correspondence, Leibniz's fifth letter, section 2. Clarke's translation is reprinted in *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, ed. H. G. Alexander (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956).

***Further references are given in the Bibliography.***

## General Introduction

Judging from Spinoza's biography, correspondence, personal library, and philosophical works, he read neither English nor French. It's safe to assume that aside from what he learned by corresponding (in Latin) with Henry Oldenburg, Secretary of the Royal Society, or by reading Robert Boyle and Thomas Hobbes (both in Latin, again), Spinoza knew little of the English-speaking peoples and their preoccupations. Likewise, Spinoza's first-hand knowledge of the French was, presumably, limited: he read Descartes (once more, in Latin), and, perhaps, encountered French soldiers garrisoned in Utrecht under the command of the prince of Condé during the French invasion of 1672, though it is doubtful he met the prince himself.<sup>1</sup>

It's odd, then, to see that Spinoza's afterlife is so tied up with his reception in English and in French. Many of these English-speaking scholars are today to be found in the United States. Suggestively, comparing Spinoza research produced in the Franco-American contexts shows how broader concerns shape narrower discussions. Our aim with this volume is to facilitate a dialogue between these outstanding traditions of Spinoza research.<sup>2</sup>

In France, it has long been the case that Spinoza attracts attention quite unlike any other seventeenth-century philosopher. In recent years, this excitement has reached a well-nigh feverish pitch: when glossy-image magazines destined for sale in kiosks publish special issues dedicated to Spinoza, you know that Spinoza has, at last, truly become a pop icon in the mold of Freud or Nietzsche. But this mass commodification has only coat-tailed recent French Spinoza scholarship, a highly developed and professionalized national tradition, as it were, of Early Modern studies. The ongoing publication of Spinoza's *Œuvres* with the Presses Universitaires de France, for which contributors from across France, Italy, and the Netherlands work under the editorial direction of Pierre-François Moreau to create state-of-the-art scholarly editions of the primary texts and make new French-language translations available for the twenty-first century, is exemplary in this respect.<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, what the historian Jonathan Israel has shown to be true of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Western Europe—that Spinoza's philosophy was the source and spring of the Radical Enlightenment—can be said of twentieth-century France: Spinoza's philosophy was the source

and spring of Radical French Theory.<sup>4</sup> Thanks to the work of scholars such as Warren Montag, Knox Peden, and Ted Stolze, there is now even a sizeable body of literature available in English about the story of recent Gallic enthusiasm for Spinoza.<sup>5</sup>

The most famous among Spinoza's more recent French readers, whose names are themselves just about as recognizable as Spinoza's own, like Louis Althusser, Alain Badiou, Étienne Balibar, Gilles Deleuze, and Pierre Macherey, to name but a few, were accompanied by figures perhaps less well-known within the wider English-speaking world, but whose reputation as Spinoza scholars is very strong. Among these, Martial Gueroult (b. 1891–d. 1976) and Alexandre Matheron (b. 1926) stand out as the towering figures. Gueroult's massive two-volume commentary on Spinoza's *Ethics* Parts 1 and 2 is often admired for setting the gold standard for super fine-grained, high-resolution readings in Spinoza scholarship, whereas Matheron's impressive *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* played—and continues to play—an important role in making Spinozism relevant to the concerns of contemporary French philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

Granted, there is also a story to tell about Spinoza's reception in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in France, some of which explains what would later come about and an interesting episode of French Spinoza scholarship in its own right. This is a story about how, for instance, Émile Saisset (b. 1814–d. 1863), philosopher at the Sorbonne, was the first to translate Spinoza's works in French, but only did this so as to more easily admonish and censure Spinoza's philosophy. It is a story about how Jules Prat (b. 1823–d. 1895), a lawyer and communard in 1871, saw in Spinoza a militant of anti-clerical Republican ideals, and whose early attempt at drawing up a Spinozist constitution for democracy would likely have remained totally forgotten by posterity were it not for Bernard Pautrat's very recent historical work.<sup>7</sup> Another important figure in this story is Charles Appuhn (b. 1862–d. 1942), whose translations of Spinoza's works, readily available in an inexpensive paperback edition since the 1960s, are still the most frequently read in France. Our reader will forgive us if we do not go into the details of this earlier period in the history of Spinoza's French reception. Suffice it to say that the sudden swelling of Spinoza scholarship did not emerge *ex nihilo*.

Still, what was it about Spinoza that spoke so compellingly to these more recent generations of French philosophers? As is often the case in the history of philosophy, a mixture of factors, some only tangentially related to philosophy itself, were responsible for putting Spinoza on center stage. To isolate but one rather idiosyncratic feature of Spinoza's late-twentieth-century French reception, namely, the way that Spinoza was held by many of his French readers to be a



genuine precursor of Marx, specifically political factors help explain this development and its importance to twentieth-century French philosophy writ large. Looking back to the 1960s, when the French Communist Party, still true to the Soviet doxa, fought in vain to propagate the view that dialectical materialist thought, allegedly Hegelian in inspiration, was the sole resource of philosophical worth, Spinoza appeared to wayward French Marxists, such as Althusser, like an oasis in this great Sahara of dialectical materialism.<sup>8</sup> Suddenly, before their eyes, there Spinoza was, the very thing French Marxists believed they had been looking for all along: a philosopher whose refusal in the name of political freedom to submit to scriptural authority could mirror their own heresy and rebellion.

In other words, the late-twentieth-century outpouring of French-language readings of Spinoza was in large part motivated by the belief that Spinoza's philosophy was unusually subversive, along with a belief that, with Spinoza, theoretical matters could somehow be put to practical use. The zeroing-in on Spinoza's boldest claims, such as those built into his anti-anthropomorphic naturalism or his rejection of Cartesian mind-body interactionism, some of which were even rebranded as philosophical rallying calls—as with Deleuze's oft-quoted Spinozist declaration that “*nul ne sait ce que peut un corps*” [nobody knows what a body can do]—meant, however, that many scholars felt left with the evermore urgent task of spelling out how these claims are part of a philosophical system, and how they are not mere assertions but are backed up by strong arguments which alone make them compelling.<sup>9</sup>

Unsurprisingly, then, Spinoza scholarship in France was at the same time marked by its preoccupation with the rigorously deductive structure of Spinoza's philosophy. Gueroult's fastidious commentary showed French readers of Spinoza just how such a study of philosophical structures might be effectively carried out. Characteristically, for Gueroult, nothing about the *Ethics* is incidental to it, and there is always some reason or another why Spinoza writes things in the exact order he writes them in: Spinoza's *mos geometricus* is what makes Spinoza's particular claims intelligible and powerful. Gueroult's death brought his commentary of Spinoza's *Ethics* to an abrupt end; he did not have the final word about the interpretation of Spinoza's texts, and there have been critical responses to Gueroult's approach, both from within France and without it. More unexpectedly, it seems fair to say that analytically trained philosophers working in the United States, with their typically careful treatment of Spinoza's arguments and their full-fledged commitment to the intelligibility of Spinoza's system, have in reality come closest to adopting Gueroult's approach to the study of Early Modern philosophy. (More about the American reception of Spinoza in a moment.)

Another, perhaps unexpected consequence of the way that Spinoza's reception in twentieth-century France was marked by a climate of ideological—and philosophical—turmoil is that unlike with respect to many other episodes of Spinoza's reception, it was less his metaphysics per se that became the centerpiece of the story, and more his moral and political philosophy, or the metaphysical underpinnings of the latter. Of course, these distinctions are very fuzzy for Spinoza: part of the pleasure for anybody who studies Spinoza is that when you discuss his political philosophy, you also get to discuss his metaphysics, and vice versa. Nevertheless, if by way of comparison we contrast the late-twentieth-century French reception of Spinoza to the late-eighteenth-century German reception of Spinoza, the latter being the time and place of the extremely significant *Pantheismusstreit*, one distinguishing feature of the French reception is that, in the spirit of the Radical Enlightenment perhaps, Spinoza's claims in moral or political philosophy receive, relatively speaking, significantly more treatment.<sup>10</sup> One way we can see this is if we turn to Matheron's influential commentary. Nothing could be further from Matheron's interpretation than the idea that Spinoza is, as the German Romantic Novalis waxes poetically, "drunk on God"; rather, Spinoza's philosophy, for Matheron as for many of his followers in France, is a philosophy of finite, singular things. With this in mind, Spinoza's genuine moral and political intentions are brought into relief.

As a matter of fact, this shift in emphasis stems from the same root as another salient trait of contemporary French Spinoza literature, to wit the frequent insistence on the meaningfulness of Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine. Again, looking to Matheron, we can identify the emergence of this trend. The very first paragraph of Matheron's Spinoza commentary begins by underlining the centrality of *conatus* for making sense of the big picture of Spinoza's philosophical efforts; a good grasp of the *conatus* doctrine and an awareness of its all-encompassing importance, Matheron suggests, allow us to make short work of the apparent barriers to Spinoza's practical usefulness.<sup>11</sup> This has now arrived at the point where talk of *conatus* has begun to seep into the mainstream, becoming synonymous with Spinoza's philosophy writ large.

For the uninitiated, it is by no means self-evident what *conatus* is, so a few words about it are in order. The canonical statement about *conatus* (which can be translated as "endeavor," "striving," or "tendency") consists in a claim Spinoza makes in Proposition 6 of Part 3 of the *Ethics* [E3p6]: "*Unaquæque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur*" [each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being]. In the immediately following proposition, Spinoza proceeds to qualify the "striving" as the "actual essence" of each thing.

Notwithstanding the veritable minefield of interpretative debate surrounding Spinoza's *conatus* today, one thing all parties can likely agree on is that the more we put the accent on these and other intimately related notions, the less likely we are to construe Spinoza as taking finite, singular things to be somehow illusory and unreal. On the contrary, the *conatus* doctrine—the universal striving for self-preservation—teaches us that, for Spinoza, all things, organic or inorganic, great or small, are endowed with an inalienable and intrinsic power of acting, for they will resist whatever would destroy them; Spinoza, therefore, does not deny the finite any reality, pace Hegel and the German Idealists (or so the story goes). Moreover, in virtue of the fact that the *conatus* doctrine is built into the heart of Spinoza's accounts of desire, natural right, and virtue, giving it pride of place amounts to jump-starting the machinery of Spinoza's moral and political philosophy.

Returning to Spinoza's French reception, then, one upshot of the abundant literature on Spinoza's *conatus* doctrine and its meaningfulness is that, in contrast to this, commitments and tensions in Spinoza's metaphysics that really may, in fact, push it toward some variety of acosmism, idealism, or mysticism have for some time now gone largely overlooked within the French context, as if such words were undecipherable hieroglyphs of a bygone era. Indeed, in this context, even the very word “metaphysics” carries with it, often enough, the same archaic connotation. This is in part due to the lasting effect of Deleuze's reading of Spinoza. In keeping with his understanding of Nietzsche, Deleuze went about drawing the strongest possible distinction between metaphysics, construed as the study of that which lays behind or beyond Nature—and, thus, the study of transcendence—and ontology, which contents itself with immanence. Deleuze then further argued that Spinoza refuses any transcendence, and as the philosopher of immanence par excellence, Spinoza therefore does not (thankfully, on Deleuze's view) do metaphysics strictly speaking.

Deleuze's dismissal of metaphysics along with Matheron's preoccupation with *conatus* inaugurated broader trends. Today, this means that French scholars tend, invariably, to gravitate away from the more well-respected and well-tilled terrains of debate in Spinoza studies, debates about the status of the attributes or Spinoza's necessitarianism, for example, and toward somewhat more outlying terrains of debate, wherein Spinoza's lesser-known works, like the *Political Treatise*, for instance, have a central role to play.

During the last twenty or so years of the twentieth century, several additional well-respected French philosophers—such as Blandine Kriegel, Henri Laux, and the recently deceased André Tosel, as well as others already mentioned—watched over the further maturation of Spinoza scholarship, attending to its

needs, spurring on its growth, and ensuring its lasting institutional respectability. Likewise, the important 1986 Chicago Spinoza Conference, co-organized by Edwin Curley and Pierre-François Moreau, bore witness to the budding globalization of Spinoza studies, the early effects of which were manifest in France.<sup>12</sup> Yet there is a sense in which French Spinoza studies are, once more, undergoing a sea-change. A new and popular trend consists in bringing the interpretation of Spinoza to bear on some relatively extra-philosophical field of study, and then, in turn, seeing what the applicability of Spinoza might tell us about Spinoza's philosophy itself. The influence of scholars as diverse as Henri Atlan (a biologist), Bruno Latour (a sociologist), and Frédéric Lordon (an economist), all of whom have made their Spinozist credentials clear in recent work, may be responsible for cementing this trend's place in France, though the influence of the work of American scholars like Antonio Damasio (a neuroscientist) or Irvin D. Yalom (a psychiatrist) may also have been decisive in this respect. It should come as no surprise that our volume finds inspiration in the fact that cross-cultural dialogues and the ongoing globalization of research agendas continue to yield ripe harvests.

With this, at last, we are brought to discussing Spinoza's reception in the English-speaking world. An Anglophone readership will be, presumably, more familiar with works on Spinoza written in English and with the history of philosophy in the English-speaking world. Among the important figures in the history of English-language Spinoza scholarship must be counted the British Idealist Harold H. Joachim (b. 1868–d. 1938), whose broadly Hegelian reading of Spinoza's metaphysics has received much attention as of late, as well as the analytic philosopher Jonathan Bennett (b. 1930), whose 1984 work *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* remains a classic in the field. Another very well-known figure is the American scholar Harry Austryn Wolfson (b. 1887–d. 1974). Wolfson's 1934 classic two-volume commentary, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, begins on a provocative note: claiming to have been asked by a group of friends whether Spinoza was a "bookish philosopher," Wolfson writes that he replied that "if we could cut up all the philosophic literature available to him into slips of paper, toss them up into the air, and let them fall back to the ground, then out of these scattered slips of paper we could reconstruct his *Ethics*."<sup>13</sup> Wolfson pulls no punches in his effort to follow through on this project, engaging with Arabic, Greek, Hebrew, and Latin texts, all of which help put Spinoza into a significantly larger philosophical context. On Wolfson's account, we must pull away the curtain and peer behind the geometrical method of Spinoza's philosophical magnum opus if we are to grasp the implicit meaning of the work

of “the last of the medievals”<sup>14</sup>; in this way, claims Wolfson, we glimpse how the *Ethics* would have looked were it to have been written the way it in fact appeared in the mind of Spinoza, *more scholastico rabbinicoque*.<sup>15</sup> However, almost as if because of Wolfson’s very own “bookishness,” the philosophical value of Wolfson’s commentary on Spinoza can be found lacking by some, the study of Spinoza sometimes becoming, in his hands, a merely comparativist survey of Spinoza’s myriad ancestors. Gueroult, a full-throated opponent of Wolfson’s approach, claims for his part that it ends up turning Spinoza’s philosophy on its head and reducing it “to an understanding of the lowest kind.”<sup>16</sup> Wolfson’s fortunes have somewhat faded with time, but there is an undeniable beauty to the Wolfsonian mosaic. Regardless, Wolfson’s place in the canon of most widely read, and therefore most influential, American Spinoza scholars is unquestionable. Additionally, Wolfson should be praised for having drawn attention to Spinoza’s debts to Islamic and Jewish philosophy, an insight that is pursued today in the work of noted Spinoza scholars such as Warren Zev Harvey, Yitzhak Y. Melamed, Steven Nadler, and Michael A. Rosenthal, among others.<sup>17</sup>

Still, much of the story of Spinoza in the English-speaking world has yet to be told. We are fortunate to present in this collection a significant contribution by one of the most important figures in the history of English-language Spinoza scholarship, Edwin Curley. His contribution is especially valuable for spelling out the kinds of concerns and motivations that could bring a young American philosopher working in the second half of the twentieth century to study Spinoza’s metaphysics. The historic publication of the second volume of *The Collected Works of Spinoza* with Princeton University Press in 2016 marks the culmination of a project Curley began some forty years ago.

Today, Spinoza scholarship in the United States is a highly developed and increasingly à la mode field of study. As Michael Della Rocca notes in his introduction to the recent *Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, some of what happened is that metaphysics as a domain of philosophical inquiry came back into vogue, and this, in part, meant that Spinoza was bound to as well.<sup>18</sup> As a matter of fact, due to the impetus of Della Rocca’s own influential work, discussions of Spinoza’s Principle of Sufficient Reason and whether Spinoza’s metaphysics commits him to deny the possibility of any brute fact whatsoever are now at the center of American Spinoza scholarship. The difference in linguistic and national philosophical cultures here is striking. In the United States, metaphysics became a dirty word during the first half of the twentieth century, due largely the impetus of the logical positivists, and was only later resuscitated by philosophers like Saul Kripke and David Lewis to become, at present, the site of some of the most

exciting debates in Spinoza scholarship. In France, metaphysics became a dirty word during the second half of the twentieth century, though for entirely different reasons, as we have seen. Yet, to the outsider, it may appear that metaphysics never really went away in France, and that, for instance, many studies in Spinoza's political theory, with their typically strong insistence on the role that the *conatus* doctrine plays in grounding Spinoza's political claims, are actually studies in Spinoza's metaphysics. It would seem that Spinoza's no-holds-barred brand of metaphysical rationalism is in fact fashionable on both sides of the Atlantic.

Another salient trend in Early Modern scholarship in the English-speaking world, which, in turn, has motivated certain trends in American Spinoza studies, is the wider adoption of contextualist approaches to the history of philosophy. Daniel Garber has long been one of the leading proponents of this approach, and many have since taken his cue to practice a disinterested history of philosophy, both within and without the United States. Lastly, in stark contrast to the relative neglect they once suffered, and in part due to the influence of the French reception of Spinoza, it is clear that Spinoza's moral and political philosophy are now seen in the United States as being undeniably important areas of inquiry as well.

Here, then, are short summaries of the volume's chapters.

The way that Spinoza's earliest philosophical readers interpreted him has proven extremely consequential for later efforts in understanding Spinoza's philosophy. This is particularly true with regard to the understanding of Spinoza's metaphysics, where misunderstandings have run amok. Yet until 1969, when **Edwin Curley** published *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation*, no recent commentator had thought to contest the interpretations of Spinoza's metaphysics found in two of his earliest and most important commentators, Pierre Bayle and G. W. F. Leibniz. Bayle and Leibniz alike, Curley claimed, had made grave mistakes in their respective interpretations. Challenging Bayle, Curley put forward the view that, for Spinoza, the relation of modes and substance is causal, not predicative; likewise, challenging Leibniz, Curley maintained that Spinoza does not embrace strict necessitarianism, or the belief that the actual world is the only possible world. (In fact, as Curley will show in his chapter, though Leibniz did generally view Spinoza committed to strict necessitarianism, Leibniz also believed that Spinoza, forced to make the occasional concession, sometimes holds a softer view.) Since 1969, much ink has been spilled about Curley's interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysics. In his paper "Spinoza's Metaphysics Revisited," Curley returns to his historic work and sets the record straight on what led him to make the claims he made, many of which, he believes, have been misunderstood in important recent literature on

Spinoza. Along the way, Curley also addresses the issue of Spinoza's so-called pantheism and the meaning of essence in Spinoza, as well as other related problems in the interpretation of seventeenth-century metaphysics. In "On Spinoza, Possible Worlds, and Pantheism," **Pierre-François Moreau** celebrates Curley's achievement in having successfully brought together Spinozists from across the globe during the course of his career, such as when he hosted the 1986 Chicago Spinoza Conference. Moreau then further looks at Bayle's and Leibniz's readings of Spinoza, and he examines why Spinoza could not have ever admitted of Leibnizian possible worlds.

In some sense, most interpreters will agree, Spinoza is a monist. Substance, or God, is conceptually and ontologically independent and unique, whereas modes, however we interpret them, are dependent on substance. But what does Spinoza understand by multiplicity, uniqueness, or even number, for that matter? **Michael Della Rocca**, in "The Elusiveness of the One and the Many in Spinoza: Substance, Attribute, and Mode," carefully unpacks Spinoza's various statements on number. With characteristic philosophical rigor, he reveals the dramatic consequences Spinoza's views on number have, when correctly construed, for making sense of Spinoza's metaphysics. On Della Rocca's bold interpretation, we discover that only improperly speaking can we say that God is one, only improperly speaking can we say that the attributes are one and the same, and only improperly speaking can we affirm that modes are many and that there are distinctions among them. Attuned to the broadly idealist undertones of Della Rocca's contribution, **Pascal Sévérac**, in "In What Way It Exists," challenges the belief that idealist interpretations are congenial to Spinoza's philosophy. Raising a series of difficult questions for interpreters of Spinoza sympathetic to some variant of idealism, Sévérac points to evidence in Spinoza's metaphysics that seems irreconcilably materialist.

The *Short Treatise* is one of Spinoza's earliest and most understudied works. In particular, the First Appendix to the *Short Treatise* has gone almost entirely unnoticed in the literature, and this despite the fact that it outwardly resembles the *Ethics* in virtue of its being written in a geometric style. **Yitzhak Y. Melamed's** contribution, "The Earliest Draft of Spinoza's *Ethics*," sheds entirely new light on this neglected early work. Melamed scrutinizes the Appendix's hidden riches, comparing side by side the First Appendix's axioms and propositions with their mirror texts in the *Ethics*. Among other things, he shows that Spinoza substantively engages with Early Modern Kabbalism in the First Appendix on the matter of divine withdrawal or *zimzum*. Melamed then establishes that the First Appendix must be, as a matter of fact, the earliest draft of Spinoza's *Ethics* that we



currently possess. From this, he draws important consequences for measuring the significance of the fact that Spinoza will later adopt a geometric method in the *Ethics* that includes definitions as well as axioms. In response to Melamed's chapter, **Mogens Lærke's** contribution, "Accidents and Modifications: An Additional Note on Axioms 1 and 2 in Appendix 1 of the *Short Treatise*," returns to the comparison of the *Short Treatise* and the *Ethics*. Lærke further examines the matter of why Spinoza abandons talk of accidents in favor of talk of modes, while also pointing to persistent issues in the translation of Spinoza's *Short Treatise*.

One very influential trend in recent interpretations of Spinoza in the United States is that Spinoza's explanatory rationalism is extraordinarily strong, so strong that Spinoza will not countenance any brute facts whatsoever, making it perhaps stronger than any other in the history of philosophy. Such interpretations are often brought under the heading of discussions of the power and scope of Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason. For **Martin Lin**, however, as he shows in his chapter "Metaphysical Rationalism," Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason cannot do all the work that some interpreters would have it do. Contrasting Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason with Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason, Lin rigorously examines the various roles that the Principle of Sufficient Reason is putatively meant to play in Spinoza's philosophy. For one thing, notes Lin, the Principle of Sufficient Reason does not motivate Spinoza's necessitarianism. For another, Lin maintains, Spinoza does not identify conceivability with existence, and, therefore, he does not reduce all existential facts to explanatory ones. Lastly, Spinoza's belief in the Identity of Indiscernibles is not, indeed could not be, grounded in an appeal to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, claims Lin. On Lin's reading, consequently, Spinoza's optimism about the mind's powers may be great, but it is not so wild as to ignore that some facts simply do not admit of reasons, not because they are brute, but because they are fundamental. **Valérie Debuiche's** response, "Leibniz's Principle of (Sufficient) Reason and Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles," revisits Lin's exploration of Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason and whether it is intended to explain all existential facts as well as non-existential facts. In this regard, Debuiche shows that Leibniz makes a subtle yet crucial distinction between the *principium reddendae rationis* and the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

Turning to important trends in the recent French reception of Spinoza, **Simon B. Duffy's** chapter, "The Transformation of Relations in Spinoza's Metaphysics," takes up the current debate about the status of essence in Spinoza's metaphysics, and whether the essences of things are variable or fixed. Does *conatus*, construed as a power of acting, admit of variability, in virtue of the



fact that, for Spinoza, all action is grounded in some interaction? Or, rather, is *conatus* a fixed and determinate quantity of power that remains the same, no matter how its bearer is affected by external things? Re-examining a number of influential interpreters of Spinoza's metaphysics in France (Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Macherey, and Charles Ramond), Duffy sheds new light on Spinoza's discussion of relations and the body's capacity to enter into relations with other bodies, thereby exercising its essential powers. In response to Duffy's chapter, **Céline Hervet**, in "Essence, Variations in Power, and 'Becoming Other' in Spinoza," challenges the claim that seemingly underpins Duffy's interpretation of Spinoza, according to which Spinoza's metaphysics can be divorced from and studied in isolation from his anthropology, his psychology, and his practical aims more generally construed. Rather, Hervet argues, Spinoza's *Ethics* is only intelligible as a totality and, likewise, his theoretical views on bodily essence and powers only become meaningful in light of his practical philosophy.

Spinoza's views on embodiment and the mind-body relation are notoriously idiosyncratic. Spinoza willfully makes two apparently incompatible claims: on the one hand, the mind and the body must be conceived under two distinct attributes, neither of which can have any effect on the other; however, on the other hand, the mind is the idea of the body. With great care, **Alison Peterman**, in "Spinoza's Two Claims about the Mind-Body Relation," looks at the precise content of the arguments Spinoza gives for each of these claims. Of special interest to Peterman is clearing up the movement that brings Spinoza from advancing his inter-attribute parallelism to maintaining that the mind is the idea of the body. By her reckoning, however, though Spinoza may want to square a broadly metaphysical account of the nature of embodiment (an account that tells us something about the how the mind-body relation is grounded in fundamental features of reality) with a broadly first-personal account of the nature of embodiment (an account wherein the mind's capacity to represent to itself ideas of external things via the affections of its body plays an essential role), Spinoza cannot, in fact, do this. In his response, "A Puzzle in Spinoza's Views on the Mind-Body Problem," **Jack Stetter** further examines Spinoza's claims about embodiment in light of Spinoza's views on the nature of representation. In particular, Stetter unpacks the significance of the fact that, on Spinoza's account of the mind as the idea of the body, the mind involves the ideas of other bodies, examining what this tells us about the complex and subtle interplay of relations of inherence and involvement in Spinoza's philosophy of mind.

An equally complex matter in Spinoza's philosophy of mind concerns his views on true knowledge. As before, Spinoza seems to straddle two distinct and

difficult to reconcile views on truth, one which is in keeping with coherence theories of truth, and another which is in keeping with correspondence theories of truth. Spinoza's bold effort at reconciling his two accounts of truth has not gone unnoticed in the history of philosophy. **Knox Peden**, in his contribution "Spinoza's True Ideas: Suggestive Convergences," revisits two important episodes in the history of the reception of this theoretical effort, and he shows how, in fact, Spinoza's philosophy of mind can even bridge the gap between analytic and Continental schools of philosophy. In this case, the parallel figures are philosophers Louis Althusser and Donald Davidson, each of whom developed unmistakably Spinozistic and rationalist accounts of true knowledge as a means of combatting rival pragmatist schools of thought. **Pascale Gillot**, in "Althusser, Spinoza, and the Specter of the Cartesian Subject," develops the analysis of Althusser's rationalist Spinozist commitment to an account of truth as adequation. She shows how the French school of rationalist epistemology, championed by Althusser and others, challenged the Cartesian postwar orthodoxy, and why Spinoza therefore remains important for understanding the history of French thought in the twentieth century.

Given the saliently nominalist tendencies of Spinoza's philosophy of mind, it is surprising to learn that so-called beings of reason have a decisive, regulatory role to play in his philosophy. **Michael A. Rosenthal**, in "Beings of Reason and the Analogical Imagination," examines this problem in light of the late Scholastic authors Spinoza would have read. Rosenthal shows that the status of beings of reason, for Spinoza, subtly touches on a number of other interconnected problems in his philosophy, most notably his views on analogical thinking, mereology, and the model of human nature. Jacqueline Lagrée, in her response "*Analogia* and *Ens Rationis*," further examines the background of Early Modern views on beings of reason. She likewise examines Spinoza's treatment of mythological creatures, metaphysical inventions, and the pedagogical or practical utility of fictions in Spinoza's philosophy.

Spinoza, on many accounts, is a moral subjectivist. He believes, it is often argued, that good and bad are merely mind-dependent realities and that all moral evaluations are subjective. In other words, he is a moral anti-realist. Not so, responds **Steven Nadler**. In his chapter, "Spinoza on Good and Bad," Nadler shows that although Spinoza may be, in some sense, a relativist, he is not a subjectivist. Rather, someone's having a "pro-attitude" toward some other thing is grounded in real, mind-independent features of the thing that make it congenial to his or her *conatus*. Likewise, Spinoza's chief aim as an ethical theorist is to show what thing or things are, indeed, most congenial to any human *conatus*.

**Lorenzo Vinciguerra**, in his response “The Knowledge of Good and Bad,” looks back over Spinoza’s philosophical corpus and shows how Nadler’s reading better suits the big picture of the evolution of Spinoza’s thought. He also looks to show how in the French literature similar interpretations have been defended, and what this says about the relation of American and French Spinoza scholarship. Lastly, he raises an important issue for measuring the meaningfulness of that which is bad or evil in Spinoza’s philosophy, namely, whether, for Spinoza, it is knowable to the same degree as that which is good.

Spinoza’s so-called free man is a hot button issue in interpretations of Spinoza’s moral philosophy. In virtue of the fact that Spinoza talks about the free man as the exemplar or model of human nature, and in virtue of the fact that no human being can be entirely free of inadequate ideas and passion, since no human being can exist without the aid and sustenance of other human beings, it has been maintained that Spinoza’s free man serves a purely regulatory role and is not, in fact, capable of real instantiation per se. In her chapter, “Generosity as Freedom in Spinoza’s *Ethics*,” **Hasana Sharp** challenges this view by examining Spinoza’s account of generosity. She argues that Spinoza’s views on a particularly militant form of generosity allow him to identify acting by oneself with acting with others, thereby short-circuiting any apparent barrier to effectively instantiating ethical, political, and social freedom. Indeed, Spinoza’s free man is, for Sharp, free in virtue of their generous love toward others. Drawing important comparisons of Spinoza’s work with such thinkers as diverse as Martin Luther King Jr., Sharp shows that Spinoza’s resources for thinking the need to respond to adversity with militant love are far from exhausted. In response to Sharp’s chapter, **Ariel Suhamy**, in “A Generous Reading,” shows that, for the French reader, such issues are particularly compelling and important to wrestle with. Suhamy turns then to the comparison of Spinoza’s moral philosophy with Descartes’s moral philosophy, and he points Sharp in the way of further pertinent questions that, if answered, may help shed light on the originality of Spinoza’s position.

Spinoza’s philosophy is celebrated for its scathing and unapologetic critique of anthropomorphism and the belief in teleology. For Spinoza, anthropomorphism and the belief in teleology are at the very root of superstition. Yet, as **Daniel Garber** shows in his contribution, “Anthropomorphism, Teleology, and Superstition: The Politics of Obedience in Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*,” Spinoza did not merely content himself with some first-degree criticisms of anthropomorphism and teleology as philosophically unsound and politically dangerous. Rather, Spinoza sought ways to co-opt the two and put them to a positive use. Indeed, as Garber demonstrates, Spinoza even goes so far

as to make use of them to ground obedience to the moral law by putting them at the center of the so-called dogmas of universal faith that he enumerates in Chapter 14 of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. **Chantal Jaquet**, in her response “Logic of the Superstitious, Logic of the Pious,” takes up the problem of the delicate distinction that Spinoza draws between superstition and piety. Jaquet shows that, for Spinoza, whereas superstition is grounded in fear and ignorance, piety concerns the inherent positivity of the imagination and the need to adopt moral truths to the individual’s *ingenium* or mentality.

As noted earlier, the twentieth-century reception of Spinoza in France was heavily marked by the presence of Alexandre Matheron. **Steven Barbone**, in his chapter “*Individual and Community and Its American Legacy*,” looks to show that Matheron’s influence was not exclusively French and that, in fact, he has a strong following in the United States as well. He examines the way that Matheron’s discussion of individual and community framed many recent debates in Spinoza studies, and the direction that American Spinoza studies have taken under the impetus of their readings of Matheron. **Lauren Bove** re-examines the legacy of Matheron in France with his contribution, entitled “Between Spinoza and Matheron, Something Happens . . .,” Bove elucidates the specific ways that French readers found Matheron’s interpretation to be important. He shows that, among other things, Matheron’s position on Spinoza was not always well-received and that, in fact, it was subject to many revisions and updates over time. He likewise examines the background of Matheron’s reading by contrasting it with the long tradition of French Spinoza studies, touching on the reading of Spinoza made by such figures as Victor Delbos and Martial Gueroult.

Spinoza, it was once believed, did not enjoy the kind of widespread readership that other Early Modern philosophers like Locke did. Likewise, Enlightenment thinkers, so the story was told, were primarily indebted to a philosopher like Locke for the content of their philosophical positions. In his influential recent work, **Jonathan Israel** has challenged this view, advancing what he calls the Radical Enlightenment thesis. The latter thesis serves a double-purpose: it clarifies the true intellectual history and lineage of the Enlightenment, and it shows in what truly consists the Enlightenment, when we look at it in its most groundbreaking, revolutionary form. In both of these respects, Spinoza’s philosophy plays an absolutely crucial role, both as the earliest historical progenitor of and the continual source of inspiration to Enlightenment thinkers. In his chapter for this volume, “Spinoza’s Formulation of the Radical Enlightenment’s Two Defining Doctrines: How Much Did He Owe to the Dutch Golden Age Theological-Political Context?,” Israel reexamines the way that Spinoza’s *Theological-Political Treatise* spurred on

the Radical Enlightenment by challenging the collusion of religious and political authority and by calling for the democratization of political life. Showing how the *cercle spinoziste*, composed of Dutch thinkers like Koerbagh and Van den Enden, played an equally important role in giving rise to the Radical Enlightenment, Israel then responds to recent criticisms of his Radical Enlightenment thesis. He shows how they have failed to appreciate the unprecedented approach to discussions of natural right characteristic of Spinoza's philosophy in particular and of the Radical Enlightenment writ large. **Charles Ramond**, in his response "Spinoza's Paradoxical Radicalism," takes up the issue of Spinoza's radical emancipatory power and his political views on authority. Carefully looking at both the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the *Political Treatise*, Ramond examines how Spinoza consistently valorizes both obedience and the longevity of states across these two texts. However, claims Ramond, these beliefs actually undergird the truly radical emancipatory power of Spinoza, a political philosopher ready to refuse all transcendence for the sake of real democracy.

## Notes

- 1 To learn more about Spinoza's life, Steven Nadler's acclaimed biography remains the most detailed and trustworthy reference. See Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
- 2 However, let it also be said that Spinoza studies in the Netherlands, in Israel, in the United Kingdom, in Italy, in Australia, and in Brazil, for instance, are historically significant and highly sophisticated pursuits in their own right, and that research pursued in France or the United States frequently involves the work of scholars hailing from these various other linguistic and national contexts.
- 3 The volumes published in this collection thus far include Baruch Spinoza, *Œuvres I: Premiers écrits*, Dutch and Latin texts edited by Filippo Mignini, introduction by Pierre-François Moreau, translations by Michelle Beyssade [TIE] and Joël Ganault [KV] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009); Baruch Spinoza, *Œuvres III: Traité théologico-politique*, Latin text edited by Fokke Akkerman, bibliography, index, introduction, and translation by Jacqueline Lagrée and Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999); and Baruch Spinoza, *Œuvres V: Traité politique*, Latin text edited by Omero Proetti, bibliography, index, introduction, and translation by Charles Ramond, with supplementary notes by Alexandre Matheron (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005).
- 4 See Jonathan Israel's Radical Enlightenment trilogy (soon to be a tetralogy), and in particular the first volume in the series, where Israel shows that Spinoza

- occupies an absolutely central place in the history of the Enlightenment: Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 5 Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford, 2014); *The New Spinoza*, ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
  - 6 Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza 1: Dieu* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968); Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza 2: L'âme* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974); Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, 2nd edn (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1988 [1st edn 1969]).
  - 7 See Bernard Pautrat, “Jules Prat, *spinoziste*,” in Baruch Spinoza, *Traité théologico-politique*, trans. J.-G. Prat, ed. Bernard Pautrat (Paris: Allia, 2015).
  - 8 Contextual factors do not tell us everything, however, about Althusser’s affinity for Spinoza. Note that Althusser describes what he himself sees as the “profound reasons for [Althusser’s] attraction to [Spinoza]” in Louis Althusser, “The Only Materialist Tradition, Part 1: Spinoza,” in *The New Spinoza*, ed. Montag and Stolze.
  - 9 For Deleuze’s own discussion of “what a body can do,” see Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969), 197–213.
  - 10 Recent literature on Spinoza’s reception by the German Idealists has thankfully enriched and nuanced our understanding of what the latter saw as meaningful in the former. See in particular the papers collected in the volume *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. Eckhart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). A classic statement in the relation between Spinoza and Hegel is given by Macherey in Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, trans. Susan M. Ruddick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011 [1979]).
  - 11 Matheron, *Individu et communauté*, 9.
  - 12 *Spinoza: Issues and Directions—The Proceedings of the Spinoza Chicago Conference*, ed. Edwin Curley and Pierre-François Moreau (Leiden: Brill, 1990). The globalization of Spinoza research was also further stirred on by the historic “Spinoza by 2000” Jerusalem Conferences, organized by Yirmiyahu Yovel and the Jerusalem Spinoza Institute in cooperation with Hebrew University’s Spinoza Research Program. Other notable efforts in bridging cultural gaps in Spinoza studies include collections such as *Feminist Interpretations of Benedict Spinoza*, ed. Moira Gatens (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 2009) and *Spinoza Now*, ed. Dimitris Vardoulakis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).
  - 13 Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Process of His Reasoning*, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), vol. 1, 3.
  - 14 *Ibid.*, vii.
  - 15 *Ibid.*, 63.
  - 16 Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, 428–461, esp.

- 17 For more recent work on Spinoza's relation to Judaism, see *Jewish Themes in Spinoza's Philosophy*, ed. Heidi M. Ravven and Lenn E. Goodman (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002) and *Spinoza and Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Steven Nadler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
- 18 *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–17, esp. 1–4.

## Part I

# Metaphysics





# Spinoza's Metaphysics Revisited

Edwin Curley

Some years ago I published a book called *Spinoza's Metaphysics* [hereafter: SMC],<sup>1</sup> which claimed, first, that Spinoza's monism, his doctrine that there is only one substance, God, of which everything else is a mode, should be understood as asserting that modes depend causally on substance, and not that they inhere in it, or can be predicated of it; second, that Spinoza was a moderate necessitarian, who believed that everything which happens is *in some sense* necessary, but not that it is necessary in a sense which would have committed him to the anti-Leibnizian claim that the actual world is the only possible world; and finally, that Spinoza's monism does not make him a pantheist, not, at least, in what appears to be the most common understanding of that term.

Not everyone, alas, has accepted all my conclusions. I suppose this was to be expected, given the difficulty of the subject. But lately I have come to think that some of my critics have seriously misunderstood the reasoning by which I reached those conclusions, and that this was, to some degree, my fault, for not explaining myself as well as I might have. I now think that if I had set out my argument in a way which came closer to the order by which I first arrived at my conclusions, I might have been better understood, and perhaps more successful in persuading some dissenters. *Perhaps*. One can always hope, though perhaps one should not hope for too much.

The critic I'll focus on is Yitzhak Melamed, whose own *Spinoza's Metaphysics* [hereafter: SMM]<sup>2</sup> is the most extensive, and potentially most influential, critique of my book I know. Serious scholars, whose ability I generally respect, have taken

This is a revised version of the paper presented at the *Colloque Spinoza France États-Unis*, a conference held in Paris in June 2016. That version is available in English on the conference website at [www.spinozapharis8.com](http://www.spinozapharis8.com). A longer version will appear in the French-language conference proceedings. The version published here is longer than either of the preceding two.

his work seriously.<sup>3</sup> But it's also, I regret to say, a critique which exemplifies, and may promote, the most common and most serious misunderstandings of my work.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter I propose to respond to his criticisms, and then to represent the main arguments I intended to make, in the different order I wish I had adopted in my book, and adding further arguments which I hope will make the case for my interpretation more persuasive.

## I.

First, though, the misunderstandings. Melamed takes my "main argument" [SMM, 40] to be this: Spinoza's modes are (or at least include) particular things; so to read Spinoza's claim that modes exist in substance as meaning that modes inhere in, or can be predicated of, substance would imply that particular things can be thought of as predicates of substance; but that would be to attribute a category mistake to Spinoza, and so violate the principle of charity, which requires us not to attribute gross errors to great philosophers; we should, therefore, adopt a different interpretation of the mode-substance relationship, which takes it to be one of causal dependence.

I protest. Not only was this not my *main* argument, it's not an argument I ever made, or would now endorse, not if we understand the terms of the argument as Melamed seems to. Take the principle of charity. Whether I would accept that will depend, of course, on what we mean by it. In SMM Melamed doesn't define that principle, but explains it, first, by appeal to Quine's discussion of interpreting logical connectives in *Word and Object*, and then by offering two hypothetical examples of historical interpretations which go astray by applying a principle of charity suggested by Quine's discussion. Quine had imagined an anthropologist encountering a native who spoke only an entirely unfamiliar language, and accepted sentences which appeared to require a translation which would be explicitly self-contradictory. He suggested that rather than simply dismissing the native as holding an absurd view, we would (and should) "impose our logic" on him, understanding his sentences as not violating the law of contradiction:

The maxim of translation underlying all this is that assertions startlingly false on the face of them are likely to turn on hidden differences of language [...]. The common sense behind the maxim is that one's interlocutor's silliness, beyond a certain point, is less likely than bad translation.<sup>5</sup>

In his text Quine didn't call this maxim "the principle of charity," but in a footnote he invited us to compare it with a principle Neil Wilson had proposed for interpreting statements about individuals, which Wilson called "the principle of charity": that we should "select as the designatum [of a person's singular terms] that individual which will make the largest possible number of [his] statements true."<sup>6</sup> So charitable interpretation has come to be understood as a principle which requires us to maximize the agreement between ourselves and others whose utterances we're trying to understand. So, Davidson:

Charity in interpreting the words and thoughts of others is unavoidable in another direction as well: just as we must maximize agreement, or risk not understanding what the alien is talking about, so we must maximize the self-consistency we attribute to him, on pain of not understanding *him*.<sup>7</sup>

Davidson's principle is controversial.<sup>8</sup> But arguably we do often use something like it. Consider Hugh Hewitt's interview with Donald Trump in the 2016 campaign, when Hewitt offered a charitable reading of Trump's claim that President Obama was the founder of ISIS.

HH: I know what you meant. You meant that he created the vacuum, he lost the peace.

DT: No, I meant he's the founder of ISIS. I do. He was the most valuable player. I give him the most valuable player award [...].

HH: But he's not sympathetic to them. He hates them. He's trying to kill them.

DT: I don't care. He was the founder.<sup>9</sup>

Hewitt's reaction here seems a natural one: he's puzzled by Trump's words and tries to find an interpretation of them which will make them say something a reasonable man might believe. Defiantly, but shrewdly, Trump resists. He knows outrageous falsehoods get more attention than sober truths. (It seems that they can even help win elections.)

Whatever we may think of charity as a general principle in philosophy of language, it's clearly dangerous in the history of philosophy. Melamed supplements his paraphrase of Quine by imagining two possible historical applications of the principle. In the first, a student of Aristotle proposes to interpret his statements about the natural rightness of slavery so that they're consistent with our modern notion that slavery is evil, understanding (the Greek words for) "slave" and "master" as meaning "employee" and "employer." In the second, a student of Descartes proposes to clear him of the charge of having committed a category mistake by revising our understanding of his position

on the mind-body relation. On this reading Descartes comes across sounding remarkably like Ryle in *The Concept of Mind*.

These are hypothetical examples, which it may be hard to imagine any serious historian endorsing. So I've been dismayed to be accused of doing the same thing. I quite agree with Melamed that the principle of charity, understood in this way, encourages anachronistic interpretations, and should be rejected [SMM, 42]. That's why I rejected it long ago.<sup>10</sup> Or to be more precise, that's why I rejected it in the form I've so far been discussing.

In SMM Melamed's account of the principle of charity is a matter of the interpreter's maximizing the agreement between himself and another person by interpreting the other person's words so that they say something he can accept. He objects that the principle of charity, so understood, not only encourages anachronism, but more crucially, deprives us of valuable challenges to "our own fundamental conceptions," with the implication that we ought to be willing to reconsider those views. In the same year in which SMM appeared, Melamed also published an article on charitable interpretation [hereafter: CI], as allegedly practiced by various commentators on Spinoza.<sup>11</sup> Though both the book and the article appeared in the same year, CI seems to represent a later, improved version of his argument.<sup>12</sup> Whereas SMM did not explicitly define the principle Melamed wished to criticize, CI does. There Melamed writes:

The logic of charitable interpretations is rather simple. Suppose a Past Philosopher (PP) makes a statement S. We believe that S, read literally, is clearly unacceptable. Since we appreciate PP as a great mind, we cannot believe that he or she could have uttered such foolishness. Thus, instead of ascribing S to PP, we ascribe S', which is different from, and sometimes even utterly opposed to S. [CI, 260]

This is broader than the implicit definition in SMM. It doesn't require the charitable interpreter to impose *his own* views on the past philosopher. All he must do, on this definition, is to offer a reading of the philosopher which has him saying *something different* from the "clearly unacceptable" statement which initially puzzled us. Presumably this "something different" will be something not clearly unacceptable (or at least, not *so* clearly unacceptable as the original statement). But this definition does not require the "something different" to be something the interpreter thinks true (or even very plausible).

The broader definition casts a wider net, permitting Melamed to attack those who reject the narrower version of the principle. But the shift to a broader definition doesn't prevent him from continuing to criticize his opponents on grounds which presuppose the narrower definition—e.g., as being "philosophical

narcissists,” who lazily try to find their own image everywhere [CI, 263]. The shift also makes it possible for him to allege actual textual evidence supporting his claim that his opponents are charitable interpreters, a nicety SMM had neglected. So in CI he cites the following, from an article Greg Walski and I co-authored:

We operate on the methodological principle that views which are tremendously implausible should not be attributed to the great, dead philosophers without pretty strong textual evidence.<sup>13</sup>

This is essentially the principle I once called “the principle of respect for the intelligence of the great, dead philosophers.”<sup>14</sup> It’s obviously *not* Melamed’s principle of charity, even on the broader interpretation of that principle. It doesn’t prescribe that the historian substitute a more plausible reading for the one he finds “tremendously implausible.” It doesn’t exclude the possibility that even a very great philosopher may have said something “startlingly false.” All it says is: if you think a great philosopher has said something *very* implausible, think twice before you accuse him of a gross error. Consider the possibility that you may have misunderstood him. Be sure the texts support your charge.<sup>15</sup>

My embrace of the principle of respect was a reaction against the positivists’ wholesale dismissal of metaphysics as nonsense. It still seems to me sensible advice, in all our discourse, though given the difficulties we have understanding one another in philosophy, it’s perhaps especially apposite there. If Melamed wants to call this a version of the principle of charity, fine. I accept that version. But then he might need some argument to show that *that* version has consequences as unacceptable as the versions I’ve rejected.

Melamed says that in SMC I held that the predicative interpretation of the mode-substance relation is untenable because it ascribes a category mistake to Spinoza. I can’t find that I ever spoke of “category mistakes.” But I did write that:

Spinoza’s modes are, *prima facie*, of the wrong logical type to be related to substance in the same way Descartes’ modes are related to substance, for they are particular things (E1p25c), not qualities. And it’s difficult to know what it would mean to say that particular things inhere in a substance. When qualities are said to inhere in substance, this may be viewed as a way of saying that they are predicated of it. What it would mean to say that one thing is predicated of another is a mystery that needs solving.<sup>16</sup>

This may be enough to justify talk of category mistakes. But note: I said only that Spinoza’s modes are *prima facie* of the wrong logical type to be predicated of substance, that if Spinoza claims that *I* can be predicated of God, it’s unclear what that would mean. I didn’t say the mystery was insoluble. In the immediately

following paragraph, I pointed out that Bayle had offered us one natural way of getting around the difficulty. In his *Dictionary* article he assumed that when Spinoza says a finite thing is a mode of God, what he means is just that whatever properties we might have attributed to the finite thing should by rights be attributed to God. As Bayle puts it:

If it were true, as Spinoza maintains, that men are modes of God, we would speak falsely when we said “Peter denies this, he wills that, he affirms such-and-such.” For really, according to this system, it’s God who denies, wills, and affirms. Hence, all the denominations which result from the thoughts of all men, belong properly and physically to God’s substance.<sup>17</sup>

When we think we’re saying something about a finite subject, we’re really saying something about God. (The *same* thing, in fact.)<sup>18</sup>

Melamed’s own interpretation of the mode-substance relation is essentially a modernized version of Bayle’s, couched in more recent jargon. He argues that Spinoza takes particular things to be bundles of tropes (i.e., particular property instances), so that they “bridge, or even undermine” the distinction between things and properties. They’re both things and properties [SMM, 59]. For all his talk about giving a hearing to voices which challenge our most fundamental conceptions, Melamed doesn’t really want to make Spinoza speak nonsense. He offers an interpretation according to which treating particular things as modes doesn’t involve a category mistake [SMM, 49, 54–57]. We can regard Mt. Rushmore as a property of God because in the end Mt. Rushmore is just a bundle of property instances.

In 1969 I thought (as I still do) that the real problem was not that Spinoza made a category mistake, but that if we make the move Bayle does, to make sense of what Spinoza says, we encounter other, more serious, difficulties, which Bayle pointed out quite forcefully:

- (1) Because different finite beings have contradictory properties—Brutus loved Caesar, Cassius didn’t—if God is the real subject of all predications, then if those propositions are true, God would have to have contradictory properties. [IV, 260–261; Gros, 568–571; Charles-Daubert and Moreau, 65–68; Popkin, 308–311]
- (2) Because some finite beings do wicked things—Cain murdered Abel, Tarquin raped Lucrece—if God is the real subject of all predications, then if those propositions are true, God would be guilty of great wickedness. [IV, 261; Gros, 571–572; Charles-Daubert & Moreau, 68–70; Popkin, 311–312]

And finally,

- (3) Because finite beings are constantly changing, if God is the real subject of all predications, then if the propositions describing those changes are true, God would be constantly changing [IV, 260; Gros, 565–568; Charles-Daubert & Moreau, 63–65; Popkin, 307–308]. Whenever a leaf flutters in the breeze, God changes.

Bayle claimed that these consequences were enough to make Spinoza's system "the most monstrous hypothesis imaginable, the most absurd and most diametrically opposed to the most evident notions of our mind" [IV, 259; Gros, 527; Charles-Daubert and Moreau, 23; Popkin, 296–297]. Melamed thinks the consequences either don't follow or are consequences Spinoza would accept.

That has some plausibility regarding the second objection. Arguably, Spinoza has views on good and evil which would allow him to accept, without qualm, our attributing to God acts we might think wicked. On the other hand, some of the consequences Bayle mentions look problematic, no matter what Spinoza thought about good and evil. As Bayle pointed out, transitive sentences in the active voice, describing the action of one thing on another, can be transformed into the passive voice, making the original object of the action the subject of an equivalent sentence. So on this reading, whenever one finite being does something to another finite being, God is doing that to himself. Or (perhaps more precisely), it's God *as the first finite being* who's doing it to God *as the second finite being*. As Bayle put it:

In Spinoza's system all those who say *The Germans killed ten thousand Turks* speak badly and falsely, unless they mean *God, modified in Germans, killed God, modified in ten thousand Turks*. [Remark N, IV, 261; Gros, 572; Charles-Daubert & Moreau, 69; Popkin, 312]

We need not think such killing wicked to think that a rather bizarre act to ascribe to the Almighty. On this reading, when Tarquin rapes Lucrece, it's really God (modified as Tarquin?) who is raping God (modified as Lucrece?). For now I leave obscene variations on this theme as an exercise for the reader. I won't say that the strangeness of these consequences shows that Spinoza could not have accepted them. But I do think we ought to wonder how he could have thought it was consistent with his firm rejection of anthropomorphism<sup>19</sup> to say that the things we normally predicate of human beings should instead be predicated of God, and that the things we normally think people do to one another, God does both to others and to himself. Bayle reports that some of Spinoza's followers complained that he misunderstood Spinoza's teaching. [See: Remarque DD, 4, 268–270; Gros,



529, 603–612; Charles-Daubert and Moreau, 26, 100–110; Popkin, 303, 329–338.] He says he's never been able to find a Spinozist who could explain to him where he went wrong. But it doesn't actually seem that hard to see why they might have thought this. The commitment to anthropomorphism is a fundamental problem with Bayle's interpretation. I don't think I saw the issue in these terms in 1969. But now that I have seen it that way, the objection seems to me both clear and fatal.

As for the first objection, Melamed thinks Spinoza can avoid the (unwelcome) consequence of accepting violations of the principle of non-contradiction by saying, not that God *simpliciter* both loved and did not love Caesar, but that God *qua* Brutus loved him and that God *qua* Cassius did not.<sup>20</sup> This is similar to the move Bayle makes in his "Spinozistic" analysis of the statement that the Germans killed 10,000 Turks.<sup>21</sup> In correspondence Melamed explained this language by using the following analogy. Suppose a man is a citizen of two countries—in his example, Poland and Romania. Some things might be true of him *qua* citizen of Poland (say, he has a right to vote in Polish elections) which are not true of him *qua* citizen of Romania.

Does this help? Take the sentence "Peter *qua* Polish citizen can vote in Polish elections." There the *qua* locution is the equivalent of a causal subordinate clause. We can paraphrase the sentence *salva significatione* by saying: "Because Peter is a Polish citizen, he can vote in Polish elections."<sup>22</sup> This use of *qua* would not avoid the attribution of human qualities to God. From "Peter *qua* Polish citizen can vote in Polish elections" we can infer "Peter can vote in Polish elections." So if the analogy holds, "God *qua* Tarquin raped Lucrece" will entail "God raped Lucrece." And, I suppose, by Bayle's reasoning, not only did God have-sexual-intercourse-with-her-against-her-will, he also had-sexual-intercourse-with-himself—and against *his* will, no less!

However, as Melamed reminds us, we must always be open to challenges to our most fundamental conceptions. Who knows what Spinoza might have thought plausible? So let's waive this difficulty. It's still unclear how we're supposed to apply this analysis to the kind of example Bayle presents as an objection to Spinoza. Consider two people, Joshua and Nicholas, one of whom believes the sun moves around the earth, the other of whom doesn't. Apparently we're supposed to avoid ascribing contradictory beliefs to God by understanding this on the following model:

God *qua* Joshua believes the sun moves around the earth; but God *qua* Nicholas doesn't.

What does this mean? If the *qua* clauses function as they do in the case of Peter's voting rights, we would understand these sentences along the following lines:

Because God is a Joshua, he believes the sun moves around the earth; but because God is a Nicholas, he doesn't.

But this is hardly grammatical. Where the *qua* locution involves a proper name, it looks as though the "is" will have to express identity, not class membership: "Because God *is* Joshua ...", "Because God *is* Nicholas ...". I don't think Melamed would actually want to say that. But if he did, wouldn't he be conceding that God, who is identical with each of two beings which have contradictory properties, himself has contradictory properties?

However the first two objections turn out, the third is so blatantly unavoidable that Melamed accepts the consequence, and argues, evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, that Spinoza admitted change in God [SMM, 38–40]. This may not be as historically unlikely as I once thought. Melamed notes that some of the Kabbalists and rabbis of the Talmud thought God was changeable. Clearly a changeable God will be easier to reconcile with the anthropomorphism of the Bible than the immutable God of philosophers like Anselm, Descartes, and Leibniz. But Spinoza's own references to the Kabbalists and rabbis don't suggest that he had much respect for their opinions:

I've read, and for that matter, known personally, certain Kabbalistic triflers. I've never been able to be sufficiently amazed by their madness. [TTP ch. ix, §34/C II 217/G III 135–136]

The rabbis are completely crazy. [TTP ch. ix, §28/C II 216/G III 134]

It seems doubtful that the Kabbalistic or rabbinic precedents would have impressed Spinoza.<sup>23</sup> Throughout his work he insists strongly on God's perfection,<sup>24</sup> historically an attribute theistic philosophers have thought a compelling reason to hold that God must be immutable.

In SMC I relied simply on E1p20c2—"God, *or* [*sive*] all of God's attributes, are immutable"<sup>25</sup>—as evidence that Spinoza would not have accepted the conclusion that God is mutable. It hadn't occurred to me that anyone would find this evidence ambiguous or insufficient. But Melamed takes the *sive* clause to introduce a qualification, not an equivalence. On his reading, all Spinoza is saying in E1p20c2 is that God's *essence* is immutable, not that God *himself* is immutable. He grants that this interpretation makes that corollary trivial, since Spinoza would have thought all essences are immutable [SMM, 39].

In principle this is possible. I've argued elsewhere that Spinoza's use of *sive* is much more complicated than is generally appreciated.<sup>26</sup> Sometimes it marks a simple equivalence between the terms it links. Sometimes it introduces what I think Spinoza intends to be a more precise way of putting things. Sometimes

it has still other meanings. So it *could* introduce a qualification here. However, E1p20c2 is only one of a number of passages in which Spinoza seems to identify God with the totality of his attributes.<sup>27</sup> So I think we should take *sive* here as indicating an equivalence, and read that corollary as affirming *God's* immutability, not merely the immutability of his essence.

Suppose I'm wrong about that. There are still other passages affirming God's immutability which don't offer Melamed any obvious way of discounting them. He could dismiss the *Metaphysical Thoughts* easily enough, arguing that there Spinoza is just restating a standard Cartesian view.<sup>28</sup> But this ground is not available for a passage like E5p20s, which says that clear and distinct knowledge

begets a love towards a thing immutable and eternal (see E5p15), which we really fully possess (E2p45), and which therefore cannot be tainted by any of the vices which exist in ordinary love, but can always be greater and greater (by E5p15), and occupy the greatest part of the mind (by E5p16), and affect it extensively. [E5p20s]

Melamed says this passage asserts immutability only "in relation to *Natura naturans*."<sup>29</sup> In his view the love Spinoza is commending in E5p20s is just a love of God's essence, not a love of God. This is a pretty dubious reading of that scholium. The citation of E5p15 in the first line is strong evidence that the immutable and eternal thing which is the object of the love Spinoza's talking about is God. So is the citation of E5p16 in the last line. So, for that matter, is the statement of E5p20 and its demonstration. Context matters ... to most of us.

In SMM Melamed says he's not aware of any *late* text which contradicts his conclusion [SMM, 39]. I suppose he intends this to excuse him from discussing the frequent and unequivocal assertions of God's immutability in the *Short Treatise*.<sup>30</sup> He doesn't say what he means by "a late text," but he treats the *Ethics* as late. Since the primary metaphysical portions of the *Ethics*—Parts 1 and 2—seem to have been essentially in place by 1665, and not to have been significantly revised after that date,<sup>31</sup> that would make anything dated 1665 or later a late text. So the *Theological-Political Treatise* will be a late text.<sup>32</sup> It contains two passages which seem to have escaped Melamed's vigilance:

Since [...] the laws of nature extend to infinitely many things, and we conceive them under a certain species of eternity, and nature proceeds according to them in a definite and immutable order, to that extent they indicate to us God's infinity, eternity and immutability. [TTP, ch. vi, §25/C II 158/G III 86, ll. 14–19]

Similarly, in TTP, ch. vi, §68, Spinoza appeals to the fact that nature observes a fixed and immutable order to show that "God has been the same in all ages,"

a teaching Spinoza finds in Ecclesiastes. Later I'll develop an interpretation of Spinoza which makes this connection between the immutability of the order of nature and the immutability of God highly significant.

Even in the *Ethics*, there are relevant passages Melamed doesn't discuss: E1p33s2, where Spinoza argues that it follows from God's perfection that his decrees could not be or have been different from they are, and that they cannot now change; and E2p10s, where he asserts that "substance is, by its nature, infinite, immutable, indivisible, etc." Finally, in a letter to Tschirnhaus written in the last year of his life we find Spinoza saying:

From the mere fact that I define God to be a being to whose essence existence pertains, I infer many of his properties: that he exists necessarily, that he is unique, immutable, infinite, etc. [Ep. 83/C II 48/G IV 335]

Spinozan texts don't get much later than that. Melamed's consideration of the relevant textual evidence is not as thorough as we might have wished.

Melamed claims, correctly, I think, that "the issue of divine immutability seems to stand or fall with that of pantheism" [SMM, 40]. That is, if we conceive God as immutable, we can't also conceive of him as being identical with everything there is, since some things change. Conversely, if some things change, and God is everything there is, then God is not immutable. So a lot hangs on the question of divine immutability. Every argument in favor of God's immutability is an argument against reading God as a pantheist.

Since Melamed denies God's immutability, he's obliged to deny also that we can equate God with *Natura naturans*, and to argue instead that God is both *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. I had thought E1p29s was pretty conclusive that Spinoza identified God with *Natura naturans*:

By *Natura naturans* we must understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, or [*sive*] such attributes of substance as express an eternal and infinite essence, *i.e.* (by E1p14c1 and E1p17c2), God, insofar as [*quatenus*] he is considered as a free cause.

But by *Natura naturata* I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, or from any of God's attributes, *i.e.*, all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things which are in God, and can neither be nor be conceived without God. [E1p29s]

Melamed grants that "at first sight" this scholium seems to endorse my identification of God with *Natura naturans*, but argues that the *quatenus* clause qualifies that identification, implying that insofar as God is *not* considered as a free cause, he's identical, not with *Natura naturans*, but with *Natura naturata*.<sup>33</sup> Spinoza doesn't

say this, of course, but Melamed suggests that he refrains from doing so because he finds it “uncomfortable” to describe God as finite or compelled.

I suppose he would find that uncomfortable, if he were ever tempted to say it. But since he claims to have demonstrated only a few pages earlier, without any qualification, that God is a free cause [E1p17c2], it seems unlikely that he would have thought he needed to address the possibility that God is considered as not a free cause. We can account for the presence of the *quatenus* clause in the first paragraph of E1p29s, without a matching *quatenus* clause in the second, by noting the ambiguity of *quatenus*. Usually it indicates scope, and implies some limit to the scope. But sometimes it has causal force. When it’s used in that sense there’s no reason to expect a matching clause of the form “insofar as God is considered as not a free cause.”<sup>34</sup>

In the parallel passage in the *Short Treatise* there are no *quatenus* clauses to muddy the waters and suggest (what Melamed requires) that *perhaps* Spinoza identifies God with *Natura naturans* plus *Natura naturata*. There the identification is clearly just with *Natura naturans*:

Here, before we proceed to anything else, we shall briefly divide the whole of Nature into *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*. By *Natura naturans* we understand a being that we conceive clearly and distinctly through itself, without needing anything other than itself (like all the attributes we have so far described), i.e., God [...]. We shall divide *Natura naturata* in two: a universal and a particular. [KV, I, ch. viii/C I 91/G I 47, ll. 20-29]

He then goes on to identify universal *Natura naturata* with the infinite modes, and particular *Natura naturata* with the finite modes.

The passage in the *Short Treatise* seems to me quite important. It’s one of only two passages in which Spinoza explains what he means by the contrast between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*; it unequivocally identifies God with *Natura naturans*, i.e., with the attributes; and it speaks of God as one division of the whole of nature. If we understand pantheism to involve identifying God with the whole of nature, this passage counts strongly against interpreting Spinoza as a pantheist.<sup>35</sup> I don’t think Spinoza was a pantheist *in that sense*, though I grant that there may be other senses in which we can call him a pantheist. More of this later.

Melamed’s Baylean interpretation of the mode-substance relation seems to be a very natural, even obvious, interpretation. I’ve met students of Spinoza who think that the mere fact that Spinoza says modes “exist in” substance shows that he *must* think they’re predicable of it. But this begs the question. When we think this interpretation through, we see that it clearly entails consequences Spinoza would never have accepted. Later we’ll see that there’s direct textual evidence against it.

## II.

Melamed ascribes to me an argument I didn't make. That's unfortunate, but these things happen. What's more serious, from my point of view, is that he ignores what I considered my main argument. So far I've followed him in discussing only negative arguments, reasons why, on my view, it's problematic to think of the mode-substance relation in Spinoza as one a property has to its subject. I haven't discussed any arguments which might provide a positive reason for thinking the relation is one of causal dependence. The negative arguments would not be sufficient without some positive argument for the alternative interpretation. Contrary to what my order of presentation in SMC evidently suggested, my central argument was a positive one. I discussed the difficulties of the predicative interpretation mainly to prepare the way for what I hoped would be a sympathetic hearing for an interpretation whose grounds were quite different. That doesn't seem to have worked out very well. Perhaps the restatement of the negative arguments in the first section of this chapter will succeed where the original statement failed. In any case, this section of the chapter will restate my positive argument, not simply repeating what I said earlier, which would be tedious and pointless, but trying to make that line of argument clearer than I did in 1969, and adding certain refinements, based on things I've learned since.

My starting point was a question about Spinoza's necessitarianism, not about the relation between substance and mode. Reading Hampshire, I found him saying that Spinoza held, against Leibniz, that the actual world is not merely one of many possible worlds, but is, in fact, the only possible world.<sup>36</sup> Let's call this "the anti-Leibnizian proposition." Spinoza himself never used this language to express his position on necessity. Hampshire was trying to convey, in terms now more familiar, a view Spinoza himself expressed in different language:

In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way. [E1p29]

And

Things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order, than they have been produced. [E1p33]

These propositions clearly show Spinoza asserting that everything which happens is necessary. So there's no question but what Spinoza was *in some sense* a necessitarian, who held that *in some sense* every truth is a necessary truth. I've never denied this, though some people treat the label "necessitarian" as if

it could only apply to those who hold the anti-Leibnizian proposition.<sup>37</sup> But there's nothing here about possible worlds, no claim that only the actual world is possible. These propositions just make claims about God's causality: that everything which happens was determined by God to happen as it does, and that, his nature being what it is, he couldn't have acted differently. I will claim for my interpretation the virtue of explaining why Spinoza thought those propositions were true. But first let's look at the interpretation of his necessitarianism to which I'm opposed.

It seems to have been Leibniz himself who first suggested that Spinoza might be committed to the anti-Leibnizian proposition. This emerges in his discussion in the *Théodicée* of Bayle's criticism of Spinoza's necessitarianism. In his *Dictionary* article on Chrysippus, Bayle wrote:

Today it's a great embarrassment for the Spinozists that according to their hypothesis it's been as impossible from all eternity that Spinoza not die in The Hague as it would be for two and two to make six. They know very well that this is a necessary consequence of their teaching, which shocks people, and puts them off, because it involves an absurdity diametrically opposed to common sense. They're not very happy for us to know that they're overturning a maxim as universal, as evident, as this: *That whatever implies a contradiction is impossible, and whatever does not imply a contradiction is possible*. What contradiction would there have been in supposing that Spinoza died in Leiden?<sup>38</sup>

So Bayle reads Spinoza as holding that it was as impossible for a particular event, like a person's death, to have happened differently than it did, as it would be for a mathematical truth to be false. In each case the supposition inherently involves a contradiction. Bayle doesn't use the concept of a possible world here. But when Leibniz discusses this passage in the *Théodicée*, he introduces it. After quoting the passage I've just quoted, and writing that Bayle's words are "sufficiently to my liking" [*assez à mon gré*], he comments that Spinoza

seems to have explicitly taught a blind necessity, when he denied both intellect and will to the author of things, imagining that the good and perfection are related only to us, and not to him. It's true that there's something obscure in Spinoza's thought on this subject. For after having denied God intellect, he gives him thought ... Nevertheless, insofar as we can understand him, he does not acknowledge goodness in God, strictly speaking, and teaches that everything exists by the necessity of the divine nature, without God's making any choice. We won't waste time here refuting an opinion so wrong and even so inexplicable. [*Théodicée* §173]

Now so far, so long as we make the omission my ellipsis indicates, I don't think Spinoza could complain about Leibniz's exposition of his views. It's certainly true that, though Spinoza attributes thought to God, he denies him intellect, that he doesn't acknowledge goodness in God, or represent the existence of this world as the consequence of a personal agent's having made a wise choice. In that sense Spinoza does "teach a blind necessity." But in the process of making this criticism, Leibniz makes another, which seems to me much more questionable:

Our own opinion is established by the nature of possibles, that is, of things which don't imply a contradiction. I don't believe a Spinozist will say that all the stories we can imagine either really exist now, or have existed [at some time], or will exist yet, somewhere in the universe. Nevertheless, we can't deny that these stories are possible. [*Théodicée* §173]

This "refutation" of Spinoza contends that there's a plurality of possible worlds, where the possibility of a world is a matter of its being conceivable without contradiction. The refutation will work only if Spinoza held that the actual world is the only one conceivable without contradiction. No doubt it's convenient for Leibniz to imply that Spinoza did hold that, as a way of distinguishing himself from a predecessor he's anxious not to be associated with. His own doctrine that God was required by his goodness to choose the best of all possible worlds brings him uncomfortably close to the full-bore necessitarianism he accuses Spinoza of.<sup>39</sup> But it remains to be shown that Spinoza thought that only the actual world is possible.

Sometimes Leibniz displays reservations about this interpretation. In *Theodicée* §174 he remarks that Bayle spoiled what he had rightly said when he criticized Spinoza for rejecting the maxim that whatever does not imply a contradiction is possible. And in a sentence I omitted from the first quote, he acknowledges that "there are passages where [Spinoza] softens his position on necessity." He doesn't say there what those passages are, but in a recently published text he does:

Even Spinoza is forced in the end to recognize that not everything is absolutely necessary. For he says [in E1p33s1] that "Something is impossible either because its definition involves a contradiction or because there is no determinate cause for producing such a thing."<sup>40</sup>

Now I would contest Leibniz's claim that Spinoza was "forced in the end" to recognize that not everything is absolutely necessary, or that passages like this represent a "softening" of his position. The passage he quotes is not one which



comes from a work later than the *Ethics*, in which Spinoza is responding to criticism of that work. It comes from the *Ethics* itself, and simply explains what Spinoza meant, a few propositions earlier, when he said that there is nothing contingent in nature: some truths are absolutely necessary, because their denial involves a contradiction; others are not absolutely necessary, but necessary only because their denial would be inconsistent with the causal order. E1p33s1 is a “softening” of Spinoza’s position on necessity only if we must interpret E1p29 and E1p33 as involving a commitment to the proposition that everything which happens is absolutely necessary. And so far we have no reason to think that.

Leibniz is right to criticize Bayle for saying that Spinoza held every false proposition to be as self-contradictory as the denial of a mathematical truth. E1p33s1 shows that as plainly as we could wish. (So, for that matter, does E2a1.) Spinoza’s necessitarianism does not require him to hold that there’s an inherent contradiction in supposing that Spinoza died in Leiden. The contradiction is between that proposition and the previous history of the world. But by implying that Spinoza thought only one world is possible, Leibniz planted a seed which has borne much fruit.

When I first wrote about Spinoza’s necessitarianism, I didn’t know this discussion. I hadn’t read Bayle’s article on Chrysippus or Leibniz’s discussion of it in the *Théodicée*, much less the fragment recently published in the Akademie edition. But even without these texts, I could see that E1p33s1 is difficult to reconcile with the idea that only the actual world is really possible. I didn’t say that the anti-Leibnizian thesis was so shocking to common sense that no competent philosopher could have accepted it. (I was not, after all, a Melamedian charitable interpreter.) What I did say was that if we interpreted Spinoza as holding that the actual world is the only one possible, his view would be open to “very strong objections,”<sup>41</sup> that the textual evidence for that interpretation was unclear and that before we ascribed such a paradox to Spinoza, we should try to understand how he might have defended it, if he held it.

Here’s the way I tried to deal with these issues. Suppose we imagine a complete and accurate description of the whole world, including all past, present, and future statements about particulars.<sup>42</sup> Because these statements describe a reality changing over time, they’ll have to be temporally indexed, if the description is to be consistent. A complete and accurate description of the actual world will include such truths as “From 20 January 2001 to 20 January 2009, George W. Bush was President of the United States” and “From 20 January 2009 to 20 January 2017 Barack Obama was President of the U.S.”

Given this apparatus, we can represent the supposed disagreement between Leibniz and Spinoza in the following way: Leibniz believes in a plurality of

possible worlds; this means that, in addition to the description of the actual world, there are other world-descriptions which differ from that of the actual world in one or more of the claims they make, and so would not be accurate descriptions of *this* world, though those world-descriptions are still logically consistent. In the actual world the Supreme Court settled the election of 2000 by deciding in favor of Bush. But we can conceive a world in which they decided for Gore, and *he* became President in 2001. If determinism is true, then to be consistently describable such a possible world would have to differ from our world in infinitely many other ways. A determinist will hold that Bush's election followed, in accordance with the laws of nature, from the prior history of the world.<sup>43</sup> So the history of any alternative world leading up to Gore's election would have to have been different from the history which in our world led up to Bush's. But on the face of it, there must be many consistently describable alternative worlds. This was Leibniz's dominant view in the *Théodicée*. When he represents Spinoza as an opponent who can be refuted by pointing this out, he implies that Spinoza would have disagreed. Wrongly, I argue.

To understand Spinoza's rejection of contingency, I thought the first move was to understand his determinism, which he seemed to formulate most helpfully in the Preface to *Ethics* Part 3:

Nothing happens in nature which can be attributed to any defect in it, for nature is always the same, and its virtue and power of acting are everywhere one and the same, i.e., the laws and rules of nature, according to which all things happen, and change from one form to another, are always and everywhere the same. So the way of understanding the nature of anything, of whatever kind, must also be the same, viz. through the universal laws and rules of nature. [E3pr]

Here Spinoza clearly commits himself to the idea that particular events must be explained through the laws of nature, a view he arguably inherited from Descartes.<sup>44</sup> In the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza connects this idea with the notion of God's governance:

By God's governance [*directio*] I understand the fixed and immutable order of nature, or [*sive*] the connection of natural things. For [...] the universal laws of nature, according to which all things happen and are determined, are nothing but the eternal decrees of God, which always involve eternal truth and necessity. [TTP ch. iii, §§7-8/C II 112/G III 45-46]<sup>45</sup>

Here the laws of nature function not merely as the proper means for understanding why things happen as they do, but also as the way of understanding how God acts in the world, what the connection is between God and the things he causes.

This idea seems to me so crucial to the understanding of Spinoza's metaphysics that I would say: any interpretation of Spinoza which does not accord a central role to the laws of nature in God's causation must be wrong. The only questions are: How is that role to be spelled out? And what does it entail?

Here's a second point, no less crucial than the first. The laws of nature are universal propositions, from which, by themselves, no particular conclusion follows.<sup>46</sup> So to understand what happens in the world, we must also understand the particular circumstances in which the laws were operating. We need to be quite clear about this, because it has important consequences. First, it's a fundamental truth of Aristotelian logic that no particular conclusions follow from universal propositions alone. Unless we're willing to say that Spinoza was woefully ignorant of traditional logic, we must presume he knew you couldn't deduce any particular event from the laws of nature alone. (And how, we might ask, could he have successfully practiced the science by which he made his living, if he didn't know this?) But we don't have to rely on presumptions. Spinoza acknowledges the logical point in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*:

From universal axioms alone the intellect cannot descend to singulars, since axioms extend to infinity, and do not determine the intellect to the contemplation of one singular thing rather than another. [TIE, §93/C I 39/G II 34, ll. 20–23]

Spinoza's awareness of this point appears also in his discussion of miracles in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, where he recognizes two kinds of ignorance which can make people think miracles occur: one is ignorance of the relevant laws, "the principles of natural things" [TTP, ch. vi, §§14–15/C II 155/G III 84, l. 4]; the other is ignorance of the particular circumstances obtaining at the time [TTP, ch. vi, §§45–51/C II 162–164/G III 90–91].

Sometimes Melamed suggests that I attributed this theory of explanation to Spinoza because I wanted to credit him with ideas "in vogue" at the time I was writing [CI, 264], and in general, that I advocated my interpretation because it "bestowed upon Spinoza a certain aura of modernity and philosophical respectability" and made his view "more attractive" to contemporary philosophers [SMM, 12, 42]. That's what charitable interpreters do. Perhaps if he paid more careful attention to the textual evidence for his opponents' arguments, he wouldn't attribute their interpretations to discreditable motives.

Reflecting on the precise form Spinoza's determinism takes is helpful because it explains why he might hold that some descriptions of alternative worlds which seem consistent are in fact inconsistent. Take the apparently possible world in which Spinoza died in Leiden. "Where's the contradiction in that?" Bayle wants

to know. Well, there's no contradiction in that proposition considered in itself. But if determinism is true, and everything which happens can be deduced from the laws of nature *plus* the past history of the world, then if we embed the proposition that Spinoza died in Leiden in a rich enough context, which contains, in addition to the laws of nature, the history of the events which actually led to Spinoza's death, there *will* be a contradiction. That rich set of propositions will entail that he died in The Hague, and that will contradict any supposition that he died elsewhere. In imagining a counterfactual history you can't change just one thing. You must change many. Infinitely many.

So far, then, reflecting on Spinoza's determinism helps us to see why many alternate worlds which might seem possible aren't really possible. That gets us some distance to seeing how he might have thought that the actual world is the only one possible. We can get still closer by noting that Spinoza thought the laws of nature are themselves absolutely necessary truths, which follow from the nature or definition of the things they apply to.<sup>47</sup> At the time I was writing, this seemed very much a minority view. Some philosophers had defended it, on the ground that the laws of nature support counterfactual inference, which seemed difficult to explain otherwise. But I think Hume's view that the laws of nature are contingent was dominant, and I would guess that it still is.<sup>48</sup>

Setting aside questions about the truth or popularity of Spinoza's view, it's clear that he will think any world in which the laws of nature are different from those in this world is not really possible. That's why he says, in E1p33, that God could have produced the things he produces in no other way, and in no other order, than they have been produced. I claim it as an advantage of my interpretation that it explains why Spinoza thought E1p33 is true. I have no idea how the predicative interpretation explains this.

If we want to understand how it might have seemed to Spinoza that everything was necessary, this should feel like progress. But if we pursue this line of thought further, we will quickly see that it cannot, in the end, justify the anti-Leibnizian proposition. Suppose we contemplate a world whose description differs from that of the actual world, not only in supposing that Spinoza died in Leiden, but also in having a history which leads up to that conclusion. This will involve an infinite regress, so it's not a process we could hope to complete ourselves, even if we had vastly more knowledge than we do. But this thought experiment does explain how a mind not subject to our limitations could construct a description of a world different from the actual world and yet consistent.

I've generally taken this line of reasoning to be grounds for denying that Spinoza thought the actual world is the only possible world. Perhaps I should

have limited myself to a more modest conclusion: that insofar as Spinoza bases his necessitarianism on determinism, and understands determinism as he does, he must allow that there are possible worlds which aren't actual. Whether he realized this is another question. Perhaps he never actually considered the question in those Leibnizian terms. (I know of no textual evidence that he did.) Perhaps if he had considered the Leibnizian question, he would have insisted that the actual world is the only one possible. But I'd need clearer textual evidence than I've seen so far before I drew that conclusion.<sup>49</sup>

These reflections on Spinoza's necessitarianism seemed to lead to an interpretation of his ontology which solved certain classic problems about his philosophy. In trying to explain his necessitarianism I had imagined a complete description of the world, which would contain, not only a description of his death in The Hague, and not only descriptions of all prior, concurrent and future events, but also statements of the laws of nature by which the earlier events led to the later ones. This prompted me to wonder: if a complete and accurate description of the world must include propositions of these sorts, what must the world be like? Can we use the logical features of this description as a guide to the logical structure of the world?

Suppose we think that if a proposition is true, it must be true in virtue of some feature of the world it describes. The *Metaphysical Thoughts* suggests that Spinoza thought that: "an idea is called true when it shows us the thing as it is in itself, and false when it shows us the thing otherwise than it really is."<sup>50</sup> So I thought Spinoza held that a true idea will represent its object as being what it is, and doing what it does; and a false idea will represent it as having qualities it does not have or doing things it does not do.

This theory of truth looks like it should have an important ontological consequence: *if we're given a complete and accurate description of the world, then the world must have a corresponding structure, embodying the features required to make the propositions in that description true.* We need a term for these truthmaking features. From the logical atomists (early Russell, early Wittgenstein) we can borrow the term "facts."<sup>51</sup> The description of the world will be a guide to the different kind of facts there are and their relations to one another: the logically different kinds of proposition in the description will be matched by correspondingly different kinds of fact; the logical relations between the different kinds of proposition will be matched by causal relations between the different kinds of fact.

In SMC I proposed using a version of this atomist metaphysics to interpret Spinoza, if only as a heuristic device. I didn't suppose that Spinoza ever explicitly

thought in these categories. But I thought it useful to ask: If he had, how would he have articulated his vision of the world? Suppose he'd accepted the idea that the world is the totality of facts, not the totality of things. How might he have developed that idea further? And what seemed most interesting about this thought experiment: Can entertaining this hypothesis give us any insight into his system which we might not otherwise have had? Can it explain why he said some of the things he said? Or how he might have responded to objections he never actually addressed?<sup>52</sup>

It seemed to me that on one important point where the atomists disagreed—concerning the existence of general facts—Spinoza would have sided with Russell against Wittgenstein. Russell argued that since general propositions can't be reduced to conjunctions of singular propositions, we must recognize general facts as part of "the furniture of the universe," distinct from any combination of particular facts. I thought that given Spinoza's insistence on the importance of the laws of nature, and given the implications of Wittgenstein's denial of general facts, Spinoza would have therefore sided with Russell against Wittgenstein. Consider the consequences of siding with Wittgenstein. His view, which denies general facts, also denies that particular facts are causally dependent on one another, and that there is a causal nexus which would justify the inference of one state of affairs from another, and that there can be a necessity for one thing to happen because another has happened.<sup>53</sup> Clearly Spinoza would not have accepted these propositions. In these respects he is the anti-Wittgenstein.

Implicit in this ontology is a conception of causality different from those found in Aristotle or Hume. On my account Spinoza thinks that if there's a relation of logical consequence between the propositions describing certain facts, there must be a causal relation between the facts, and conversely. I knew Spinoza had been criticized for confusing the relation of logical consequence with that of causality.<sup>54</sup> It's indisputable that he does use language which implies a close connection between these relations. What I thought questionable was that this way of speaking necessarily involves a confusion.

The conception of causality I hypothesized was very like one Kenneth Clatterbaugh has recently attributed to Descartes: a cause is any proposition which occurs as a premise in a scientific explanation.<sup>55</sup> For Spinoza, I would amend Clatterbaugh's account of Descartes: causes are things in the world, not in what we say about the world; so I would not say that a cause is a proposition of some sort, but that a cause of a phenomenon is any feature of reality described by a proposition which occurs in a correct scientific explanation of the phenomenon. This implies that the traditional Aristotelian classification of causes will not fit easily into Spinoza's system.<sup>56</sup>

I don't claim that this conception of causality is preferable to more familiar conceptions. But I do think it has certain attractions. It recognizes the causal role, not only of the particular events we normally think of as the causes of other particular events—the spark, say, which ignited the gas coming from the burner on the stove—but also of the background conditions we're apt to ignore because they are typically present and are not happily thought of as events—like the presence of oxygen in the environment.<sup>57</sup> And what is most crucial for our purposes: it assigns a causal role to those general features of reality which are *always* present, which the laws of nature describe. Without such general facts as that connecting sparks and the presence of oxygen with ignition, events like the spark would not necessitate an event like the ignition. If you think a cause should be something which explains an event (or contributes to its explanation) by showing (helping to show) that it was necessary under the circumstances, you may find this way of thinking of causality preferable to the Aristotelian conception.

Another attraction is that because this conception of causality is broad enough to allow for causal relations between general features of reality, it can accommodate the fact that science doesn't try to explain *only* particular events, but also lower level regularities, which it seeks to deduce from more general regularities. Cartesian science certainly attempted this. The first two chapters of Descartes's *Dioptrique* provide an example, when they try to explain light rays' bending in the way they do, as they pass from one medium to another, by showing that it follows from facts about the nature of light (that it's an action, or inclination to move), combined with facts about the laws governing motion. No doubt Descartes's explanations would look very crude to a modern physicist. But his attempt does show a kind of ambition I think scientists still have.<sup>58</sup>

Descartes held not only that scientists can deduce less general laws of nature from more general laws, thereby explaining the less general laws, but that in an ideal formulation of science, all the laws of nature would find their place in a deductive system. We find this program expressed metaphorically in the preface he wrote to the French edition of his *Principles of Philosophy*:

The whole of philosophy is like a tree, whose roots are metaphysics, whose trunk is physics, and whose branches are all the other sciences, which reduce to three principal sciences: medicine, mechanics and morals. [CSM I 186/AT IX-2 14]

In the *Principles* Descartes tries to make good on this program by deducing the most basic laws of his physics, the laws of motion, from the nature of God, and the laws of the less fundamental sciences from the laws of motion. The first deduction is supposed to depend on God's immutability, which entails that when



he created the world, he could not create a world in which the quantity of motion was not preserved.<sup>59</sup> From this conservation principle it's supposed to follow that in any world God created, bodies would have to obey such laws as the principle of inertia and conservation principles governing the transfer of motion between bodies which impact one another. From these laws of motion, which apply to all bodies, Descartes hoped to deduce the laws of all the more special sciences, such as the laws of reflection and refraction in his *Dioptrique*.

The idea of a unified science has been popular in recent philosophy of science, so Melamed may have ignored this aspect of my interpretation because he thought it just another deplorable attempt to make Spinoza appear respectable to twentieth-century analytic philosophers. (God forbid that Spinoza might have held any view more recent philosophers would find attractive!) So it may be worth insisting on this connection with Cartesian science, and its clear textual support. It was Stuart Hampshire whose work suggested to me the importance this Cartesian program had for understanding Spinoza. Hampshire wrote:

If we are to provide a complete explanation of the existence and activity of anything in the Universe, we must be able to deduce the existence and activity of the thing studied from the essential attributes and modes of the self-creating God or Nature. This so-called pantheistic doctrine can in fact be fairly represented as the metaphysical expression of the ideal or programme of a unified science, that is, of a completed science which would enable every natural change to be shown as a completely determined effect within a single system of causes; everything must be explicable within a single theory.<sup>60</sup>

I didn't think Hampshire gave us proper evidence for this idea, or completely realized its potential, but I found it wonderfully suggestive. In many respects my interpretation of Spinoza's metaphysics was a development of this idea.

That Spinoza agreed with Descartes about the logical structure of science, and that he thought this structure had ontological implications, seemed to me clearest in the *Treatise on the Intellect*, where he contrasts "singular, changeable things" with "the fixed and eternal things." He begins with the observation that:

To unite and order all our perceptions, we must ask [...] whether there is a certain being—and if so, what sort of being it is—which is the cause of all things, so that its objective essence may also be the cause of all our ideas. Then our mind will [...] reproduce nature as much as possible. It will have nature's essence, order and unity objectively. [TIE, §99/C I 41/G II 36, ll. 7-13]

Some things in the continuation of this passage may be unclear, but one thing is clear in what we have so far: Spinoza is envisaging a deduction which would begin



with the idea of God (the cause of all things), and end in ideas of particular things. For our mind to reproduce nature as much as possible, Spinoza says, we must:

Deduce all our ideas [...] from real beings, proceeding, as far as possible, according to the series of causes, from one real being to another. [TIE, §99/C I 41/G II 36, ll. 15-17]

He's emphatic that by "the series of causes" he does not mean "the series of singular changeable things," but only "the series of fixed and eternal things" [TIE, §100].

What are these fixed and eternal things? My suggestion was that they are a series of general facts which are truthmakers for the laws of nature. Spinoza says they have "laws inscribed in them, as in their true *codices*." The *Nagelate Schriften* translates *codices* as *wetboeken*, lawbooks. On my reading that's an apt metaphor. As a lawbook gives authority to the civil laws inscribed in it, so what grounds the laws of nature are the features of the world which make those laws true.

The first member of this series, on my account, would be a set of general facts constituting one of God's attributes, and expressing its nature. When Spinoza argues in E2 that we have adequate knowledge of God's essence [E2p47], this is knowledge, not of the definition of God in E1d6, but of one of God's attributes,<sup>61</sup> a knowledge Spinoza thinks our ideas of the particular things instantiating those attributes presuppose. He tells us more about the attribute of extension than about the attribute of thought, so I concentrate on extension. E2p45 tells us that having the idea of a particular extended thing requires us to have the idea of extension. This seems obvious. E2p46 adds that this idea must be adequate. This seems reasonable, if you think we have an immense number of ideas of extended things, and that inadequacy results only from having an unrepresentative selection of ideas belonging to a certain class.

E2p49 tells us that ideas inherently involve an affirmation or negation. That is, they have a propositional structure.<sup>62</sup> So I took it that having a clear idea of extension requires understanding certain general propositions about extended things which are implicit in that idea. The concepts of general things involve the laws governing the behavior of the particular things which exemplify the general things. From general propositions about all extended things there would follow, first, general propositions about the properties all extended things have, such as motion and rest, and then propositions about the properties particular kinds of extended things have.

Spinoza could not follow Descartes in this program without making significant modifications to it. His ideal science would not begin with a personal God, creating the world by an act of free will, an unfettered power to do whatever at the moment might please him. That would explain nothing.

And it would also create problems about God's immutability, since it requires an unchangeable God to act differently at one time than he had previously.<sup>63</sup> Rather Spinoza thought that the most basic assumptions of the science which would explain the phenomena of physical nature—the axioms explicating the nature of extension—could stand on their own, and did not depend in any way on the will of an omnipotent person. Their truth was inherently necessary and evident. But Spinoza did, I think, agree with Descartes that the various sciences dealing with particular kinds of extended things could be organized into a deductive system.<sup>64</sup> The foundation of this system would not be any assumption about the immutability of God's will. Its axioms would be the most general statements we can make about bodies. But as in Descartes, the laws of motion would be crucial to deducing the lower level laws.

TIE §§99–101 projects the possibility of a deductive science of bodies, and on my view the physical excursus following E2p13 gives us a sketch of the way Spinoza at one stage thought that science might begin.<sup>65</sup> There he purports to deduce the principle of inertia and other physical principles from certain obvious sounding propositions about bodies. Did Spinoza really think the deduction could culminate in propositions describing the existence and changes of each particular thing in the universe, without any other information? TIE §101 concludes with a statement which might seem to say this:

Though these fixed and eternal things are singular, nevertheless, because of their presence everywhere, and most extensive power, they will be to us like universals, or genera of the definitions of singular, changeable things, and the proximate causes of all things. [TIE, §100/C I 41/G II 37, ll. 5–9]

We might infer from this that Spinoza held the fixed and eternal things to be, by themselves, logically sufficient conditions for the existence and activities of singular changeable things. But I think that's the wrong conclusion to draw. For one thing, it would be inconsistent with what we said previously about Spinoza's understanding of scientific explanation: that he understood the role laws play in such explanation, but also understood that because laws are universal propositions, they couldn't be sufficient by themselves to explain particular events. Spinoza does think that to understand how a thing derives from God, we must attend *first* to the series of fixed and eternal things—or, to the laws of nature "inscribed" in them—and not to the series of singular, changeable things. One reason he gives for this is that the series of singular, changeable things is infinite, and so beyond our grasp, implying, I think, that the series of fixed and eternal things is finite and graspable.<sup>66</sup> But he also says that because there are

“infinitely many circumstances in one and the same thing, any one of which might be a cause of the existence or nonexistence” of the thing we’re trying to explain, we should not try to understand their series. I take this to imply that other singular things are among the causes of the singular thing to be explained, but that it would be difficult for us to identify which singular things ought to be included. So the fixed and eternal things are not by themselves sufficient.

I suspect Spinoza thought that unless we know the relevant laws of nature, we can’t know which of the infinitely many circumstances antecedent to a phenomenon is causally relevant to its occurrence. Consider an example he uses in the *Theological-Political Treatise*: the ancient Israelites did not know the laws of optics which explain parhelia; so they didn’t appreciate that when ice crystals are present in the atmosphere, the sun’s light may last longer than we would have expected. In their ignorance, they attributed the greater duration of the light at Jericho to God’s having made the sun stand still, not to the presence of those ice crystals.<sup>67</sup> Whether Spinoza’s right about that or not, he’s clearly thinking of the unusual duration of the light as explicable only by a deduction which includes, among its premises, both laws of nature and statements of antecedent conditions. The existence and activities of singular changeable things are caused both by the fixed and eternal things and by other singular changeable things. Each of these kinds of cause is necessary. Only jointly are they sufficient.<sup>68</sup>

One reason which led me to propose that the relation between modes and substance was causal rather than predicative was that this picture of the world as consisting of facts of these kinds, causally related to one another in these ways, did not allow for modes to be predicated of substance. If this ontology is correct, predication takes place within modes and attributes, not between them. As noted above, Spinoza’s ideas have a propositional structure, which involves predicating a property of a subject [E2p49]. So their corresponding modes in the attribute of extension must have a similarly complex structure.

Difficulties of the kind Bayle had alleged were certainly a factor in my proposing a causal interpretation. Taking the relation to be predicative seemed to lead to consequences Spinoza would not have accepted. If there were no alternative to the predicative interpretation, we might just have to accept that Spinoza’s system is marred by the kind of incoherence Bayle alleged. But I knew there were alternatives. Sometimes Melamed writes as if, when I offered my interpretation, I was setting myself against the universal opinion of previous scholars:

In order to avoid these absurdities, so skillfully pointed out by Bayle, Curley suggests that we should do away with *the* traditional, literal interpretation of the

substance-mode relation in Spinoza as a relation of inherence [in favor of an interpretation which stresses causal dependence]. [SMM, 9]<sup>69</sup>

The definite article here is Melamed's, but the emphasis on it is mine. Where does that article come from? In 1969 it didn't seem to me that there was a consensus among Spinoza scholars about the interpretation of the definitions of substance and mode. I knew that some previous readers had taken the doctrine that modes "exist in" substance as Bayle had, and that this was a very natural reading. But I knew that others hadn't, notably Wolfson, who rejected the predicative interpretation quite firmly.<sup>70</sup> I didn't think Wolfson's own alternative was that promising [SMC, 28–36]. But I tried to show that in the Cartesian tradition Spinoza was working in there was a more promising alternative and that he knew it. Sometimes Descartes defines substance as the subject in which properties exist (e.g., in the *Geometrical Exposition*, Def. V [CSM II 114/AT VII 161]); sometimes he defines it as what exists independently of anything else (e.g., in *Principles* I, 51[CSM I 210/AT VIII-1 24]). Spinoza was aware of this ambiguity, since he reproduced versions of both definitions when he expounded Descartes geometrically.<sup>71</sup> As far as maintaining consistency with Cartesian usage was concerned, he might have adopted either definition.<sup>72</sup>

The primary reason I favored a causal understanding of the definition was that the textual evidence seemed to show that Spinoza endorsed:

- (i) a theory of scientific explanation which emphasized that such explanations involve deduction from the laws of nature, conjoined with statements of antecedent conditions;
- (ii) a theory of causality which held that the causes of a feature of reality are those other features of reality which would be described by a correct scientific explanation of the feature;
- (iii) a theory of the ideal nature of science according to which its laws could be organized into a deductive system, whose axioms would be the most general statements we can make about the world, and whose theorems would be the less general laws, with laws of motion playing a crucial role in the deduction of the lower level laws;

and finally,

- (iv) a theory of truth which held that propositions are true just in case they correctly describe the feature of reality they aim to describe.

I don't claim to know that the propositions I ascribe to Spinoza are *true*. Probably some of them are false. But I do think they're propositions an intelligent

philosopher in the seventeenth century, convinced of the promise of the new philosophy, might easily have believed.

These commitments—all, I think, well supported by considerations of text and context—suggested the following correlation between Spinoza's language and the language of the interpretation:

- (1) God's attributes have an essential nature explicated by the axioms of the science explaining the behavior of things possessing that attribute. We can identify the essential nature of extension with the most general facts about extended things.
- (2) The infinite modes of an attribute are the general facts which are truthmakers for the theorems of the science explaining the behavior of things possessing the attribute.
- (3) The finite modes of an attribute are the facts which are truthmakers for the propositions describing the behavior of the particular things possessing that attribute.

Items in the first two categories can be identified with the fixed and eternal things of the *Treatise on the Intellect*. Items in the third category are the singular, changeable things of the *Treatise on the Intellect*. Items in the first category are the adequate cause of items in the second category. That is, the infinite modes are deducible from the attributes of which they are modes. Items in the first two categories are partial, but not adequate, causes of items in the third category.<sup>73</sup>

My method was hypothetical in the following sense. Although I believed I had good textual support for commitments (i)–(iv), what moved me to suggest the identifications in (1)–(3) was the thought that if we understood Spinoza in this way, that would enable us to answer certain questions about, or criticisms of, his philosophy.

Consider, for example, the question about what Spinoza is referring to when he talks about God. This is a point on which Melamed and I disagree. He takes “God” to refer to the whole of nature, *i.e.*, *Natura naturans* plus *Natura naturata*. This is a common view among Spinoza scholars, usually supported by appeal to Spinoza's use of the phrase *Deus sive Natura*, which occurs twice in E4pr, and twice again in the demonstration of E4p4. I, on the other hand, take “God” in Spinoza to refer to *Natura naturans*, resting my case mainly on E1p29s and KV, I, ch. viii.<sup>74</sup>

Melamed's way of explaining the reference of “God” has one attraction. If we understand God to be the whole of nature, *everything* that exists, there can be

nothing “outside of” God which could be his cause. If God has a cause, he must be his own cause. We may stumble if we try to explain how the whole of nature could be its own cause in any positive sense. But at least it's easy to give the notion of God's being *causa sui* a negative interpretation: there is, by definition, *nothing else* the whole of nature could be caused by.

This advantage, though, brings with it a certain disadvantage. It makes the question of God's existence a little too easy. Who would deny that the whole of nature exists? We may disagree about what kinds of thing comprise the whole of nature, or whether there are infinitely many such things, or only finitely many. But if “the whole of nature” refers to everything which exists, then to say that it exists is to say that everything which exists exists. As Horatio says, “There needs no ghost [...] come from the grave to tell us this.”

If, on the other hand, we take “God” to refer to the general features of the universe which are truthmakers for the most fundamental laws of nature, we are at least taking “God” to refer to something about whose existence there might be some dispute. Is it really possible, in principle, to construct a science of extended nature which would have fundamental laws from which all the other laws needed to understand the behavior of extended things could be deduced? Can we hope that that science will have fundamental laws so evident that they need no explanation? The answer *might* be “yes,” in which case we would have grounds for saying that there is a first cause of all things which is its own cause. This “something” might differ in many ways from the God of traditional philosophical theology, but its being a first cause would mean it had something in common with God, as philosophers have generally conceived God. On the other hand, the answer might be “no.” In that case we would have to give up this way of defending the idea that there is a God.

This way of thinking about Spinoza also, I thought, offered what seemed a pretty clear way of explaining how God might be the cause of all particular finite things. When a leaf flutters in the breeze, this must be explicable by the laws of extended nature and the conditions obtaining antecedently among other finite extended things. On the hypothesis under consideration here, we could, in principle, connect God with this event through a chain of laws which leads down from the most fundamental laws to the lowest level generalizations needed for this case. By contrast, if we take God to be the whole of nature, it's unclear how that whole causes what happens among its parts. No doubt we can imagine that the various *parts* of the whole are connected with one another in such a way that a change in any one part can effect changes in all the others. But to say this is not

to say that there is a causal relation between *the whole* and its parts. The causal relation would be between *some* of the parts and others.

One of the most important advantages of my interpretation, I've always thought, has been that it gives a plausible explanation of the infinite modes. Many commentators have wondered why Spinoza thought God must have some modes which are infinite and eternal.<sup>75</sup> They've also wondered what these modes might be. There are no such entities in Descartes's ontology. Why did Spinoza think he must make room for them in his? This has been a puzzle ever since Spinoza began circulating the manuscript of the *Ethics* among his friends.

I thought my interpretation explained why there must be such things, and what in general they might be. It postulates a deductive science of extended things, from whose axioms there will follow a system of laws capable of explaining whatever happens among particular extended things. Spinoza's commitment to a version of the correspondence theory requires that there be "truthmakers" for the laws which follow from the axioms. Since those laws are strictly universal generalizations, not limited to a particular time or place, but holding everywhere and at all times, since they are (on this conception of laws) necessary truths, and since the facts they describe are thought of as having causal power, it makes sense to say of these general facts what Spinoza says of the fixed and eternal things in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*: that they are present and powerful everywhere, the proximate causes of all things. It also makes sense to say of them what Spinoza says of universal modes in the *Short Treatise*: that they "have been from all eternity, and will remain to all eternity, immutable." Given the importance of laws of motion in the new science, it's not surprising that when Spinoza wants to give an example of an infinite mode in the attribute of extension, the example he repeatedly gives is motion (or motion and rest).<sup>76</sup> Nor is it surprising that he should beg off from saying more about the infinite modes than he does by claiming that it belongs more properly to a treatise on natural science than to a treatise in philosophy [KV, I, ch. ix, §1].

So far, then, we have this: my interpretation gives a plausible account of what "God" refers to, of why Spinoza thinks of that being as God, and of how God, so understood, could be causally related to the infinitely many things he is supposed to cause. It also explains why God's nature should cause the existence of infinite modes, and what those infinite modes might be. These are not small matters. But now I turn to one final—and particularly important—problem I thought my interpretation could solve: How are we to explain, in Spinozistic terms, the existence of finite modes?

Why is this a problem? Well, E1p16 says that from the necessity of the divine nature, there must follow:

Infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect). [E1p16]

It has seemed to many readers of this text that if finite things follow with logical necessity from the nature of a being whose existence is itself logically necessary, they ought to share the necessity of their cause. But they manifestly *don't* share that necessity. If they did, they wouldn't be finite in their existence; they would neither come into being nor pass away.<sup>77</sup> But they do come into being and pass away.

On my reading, the explanation for this is that the causation of finite modes is more complicated than the causation of the infinite modes. God—or more precisely, one of his attributes—is a logically sufficient condition for each infinite mode he causes. The laws describing the infinite modes follow from the most basic laws of one of God's attributes without any other propositions being necessary for their deduction. So the general facts which are truthmakers for those laws will have the corresponding relation of causal dependence. Spinoza says that the infinite modes follow *from the absolute nature* of one of God's attributes [E1p21 and E1p23]. I take this to mean: the infinite modes follow from the nature of God's attributes *unconditionally*, without it being necessary to make any further assumption.<sup>78</sup> That's why the infinite modes are infinite and eternal. They are truthmakers for laws which require no temporal or spatial limitation in their statement.

But no attribute of God is by itself a logically sufficient condition for any of its finite modes. The model of explanation we've found in Spinoza calls for us to explain finite happenings by appealing, not only to the laws of nature, but also to the antecedent conditions of the happening. So finite modes follow from the relevant infinite modes only because the appropriate finite modes—particular facts existing among the antecedents of the particular facts to be explained, but not existing always and everywhere—are also a part of the story. In the language of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the fixed and eternal things are either *causa sui* or caused ultimately and adequately by something which is *causa sui*. But the singular, changeable things are caused by the combination of a finite series of fixed and eternal things with an infinite series of other singular, changeable things.

There is, of course, a price to be paid for this solution. The feature of my interpretation which explains how it is that finite modes can be *finite*, not infinite and eternal—i.e., the claim that the laws explain particular facts only if we are



able to bring in information about the antecedent conditions—is also the feature of my interpretation which entails a rejection of extreme necessitarianism. It's because the explanation of finite facts requires the assumption of other finite facts—i.e., because laws alone, without further assumptions about antecedent conditions, cannot explain any finite thing—that there are possible worlds which are not actual. So if you think, as many interpreters seem to, that Spinoza *cannot be* a moderate necessitarian, that he *must* have thought that the actual world is the only possible world, you will want to reject this solution. But if you do take this step, you should be honest about the price you pay for it.

You may also object—and I'm sure some Spinoza scholars will object—that this solution implies a restriction on the principle of sufficient reason which Spinoza could not accept. Spinoza claims that for each thing that exists, there must be a cause or reason for its existence, and that for each thing which does not exist, there must be a cause or reason why it does not exist [E1p11d2]. Does my interpretation satisfy this principle? It does entail that each particular mode—whether infinite or finite—has an adequate causal explanation. It does not entail that the totality of finite modes under a given attribute has a causal explanation. Rather, it rejects that idea as inconsistent with the fundamental idea that no particular conclusion can follow from universal premises alone. In my view we ought to accept this result as an inevitable consequence of the only form of explanation Spinoza clearly supported. But if anyone can show me how Spinoza could get to a stronger conclusion without giving up any of his fundamental commitments, I would like to see how that works.

### III.

In 1969 I argued for my interpretation of the substance-mode relation by the kind of indirect reasoning so far described. That reasoning evidently seemed to me so strong that I did not feel the need to cite the more direct textual evidence which I must have known existed. By 1987 I'd written a paper on Bennett's predicative interpretation which mentioned TIE §92 as a passage which supported my reading. But even then I didn't give it the prominence I now think I should have, mentioning it only in a footnote.<sup>79</sup> In the TIE Spinoza had written:

If a thing is in itself, or [*sive*] as is commonly said, is the cause of itself, then it must be understood through its essence alone. But if it is not in itself, but requires a cause to exist, then it must be understood through its proximate cause. [TIE, §92/C I 38-39/G II 34, ll. 10–13]

I take this as an explicit endorsement of my interpretation of the definitions of substance and mode. What Spinoza says here is that for something to exist in itself, it must be its own cause; but if something is not in itself, it must be caused by something else. Spinoza could hardly have made it clearer that he understood the substance-mode relation to be, by definition, one of causal dependence. If Melamed discussed this passage, he would no doubt find some way to discount it. After all, it comes from one of those early works we are supposed to disregard in deciding what the later works mean. But so far as I can discover, this is the only passage in which Spinoza explains the language he would later use in the central definitions of the *Ethics*. And I know of no later passage where he contradicts what he says here. So I really think it's important evidence of his meaning.

I come, finally, to an objection Melamed must be very fond of, since he repeats it several times. We can call it the "good old theism" objection:

The claim that Napoleon is a mode of God should, according to Curley, amount to nothing over and above the claim that God is the (efficient) cause of Napoleon. Under this interpretation the claim that all things are modes of God appears to be completely innocent (in fact, too innocent) insofar as it ascribes to Spinoza nothing more than the common theistic view that God is the cause of all things. [SMM, 9]

In a later variation on this theme Melamed writes:

If, as Curley suggests, Spinoza takes modes to be just effects of the substance, then ... Spinoza turns out to be much closer to good old theism. For many, this may seem to disappointingly flatten Spinoza's far more bold and interesting position. The price we pay for making Spinoza *like us* is that it is no longer clear why we should have an interest in Spinoza (we have plenty of ourselves even without Spinoza, and we have plenty of other theists in the seventeenth century). [SMM, 43]<sup>80</sup>

Now I would not concede that my interpretation actually makes Spinoza *like us*. Granted, I make use of certain twentieth-century ideas to formulate the position I attribute to Spinoza. But I don't know of any philosopher in any century who has put these ideas together in quite the way I claim Spinoza did. I would guess that many of "us"—say, those of us who think that ideally the best way to explain what happens in nature is by appealing to its laws—would find some of it attractive. But even those who find *that* attractive might doubt whether it's possible to formulate an ideal science which would explain everything by appeal to laws which follow logically from basic laws so evident that we cannot doubt them, or whether, if such a science should turn out to be possible, its existence would entail the existence of general facts which can serve as truthmakers for its laws. I would guess that the jury is still out on these matters.

But the claim that my interpretation makes Spinoza *like* us is just rhetoric, which assumes facts about what *we* believe which are not in evidence. Melamed's more substantive objection is that my interpretation makes it difficult to explain why intelligent contemporary readers like Leibniz found Spinoza's monism so unorthodox, a reaction which is supposed to be more intelligible on Melamed's predicative reading. In framing this objection Melamed makes a number of assumptions I wouldn't accept.<sup>81</sup> But I grant that if my interpretation could not explain why someone like Leibniz might have found Spinoza's system disturbing and unacceptable, that would count against it. My main response to this objection is to its assumption that my interpretation of the substance-mode relation ascribes to Spinoza nothing more than the common theistic view that God is the cause of all things.

Melamed's insistence on inserting the term "efficient" in his paraphrase of my view is a clear sign that something has gone wrong here. That Spinoza should think of God as being, *in some sense*, the cause of all things is necessary, I would say, for his conception of God to count as a conception of *God*. The house of the monotheistic traditions may have many rooms, but theists do generally insist pretty strongly that God must be the cause of the world. When we ask, though, whether Spinoza is saying something bold, and interesting, and different from most theistic views, it actually makes some difference *how* we think his God causes things. As I thought I had said clearly enough in SMC, the traditional Aristotelian categories are not much help in trying to understand Spinoza's conception of causality. For Spinoza, I claim, a cause of a phenomenon is a feature of reality described by a proposition which occurs in its scientific explanation, where a scientific explanation is required to subsume the phenomenon under the laws of nature. On that view, God is the cause of all things in the sense that everything which exists or happens in the world can in principle be explained by a system of scientific laws which explicates the most fundamental properties of being, combined with statements about the prior history of the world. God's causal actions are necessary because the fundamental laws of nature are necessary truths, which transmit their necessity to all the other laws derivable from them. Contrary to Leibniz, the ultimate cause of all things is not a choice made by an intelligent agent, *sub specie boni*.

Spinoza's metaphysics is not, then, "good, old theism" in any form Leibniz would have found acceptable. My interpretation provides firm grounds for his complaint: Spinoza does not locate the ultimate cause of all things in the wisdom and goodness of an all-powerful personal being. It's one thing to say that Spinoza's understanding of God represents a possible way of conceiving of

*God*: it's a way of thinking of God not *so* remote from common monotheistic ways of thinking that Spinoza's use of the term "God" is a joke worthy of Lewis Carroll. But there's nothing in my Spinoza for those who hope to be reassured that whatever happens, happens for the best, because it's part of the plan of an infinitely wise and good creator, who can see the good which will result from allowing a few judiciously chosen evils, a creator who loves us and wishes us well. Spinoza's God makes no choices designed to bring about any ends. "He" has no ends. And unlike the God of the Hebrew Bible, he is no lawgiver. My interpretation makes it quite understandable that Leibniz should think Spinoza posed a danger for ordinary theism. In SMC I borrowed a phrase from Pollock to characterize Spinoza's relation to the tradition when I said that his use of the ontological argument was "a crucial step in ... his 'euthanasia of theology'" [SMC, 41, 82]. How clearly do you have to say something to avoid misconstruction?

#### IV.

If we take "pantheist" to mean what Melamed means by it, Spinoza is no pantheist. He does not identify God with the whole of nature. But "pantheism" is an ambiguous term. Suppose we start with a broader definition: "pantheism" need not mean only the doctrine that God is everything and everything is God. Any philosophical theory which holds that God is immanent in the universe may also count as pantheistic.<sup>82</sup> This is more promising. Spinoza does say that "God is the immanent, not the transitive [*transiens*], cause of all things" [E1p18]. E1p18d suggests that an immanent cause is the cause of an effect which is "not outside" the cause, whereas a transitive cause is one which causes something "outside" itself. Since E1p15 has assured us that whatever is, is *in* God, it comes as no surprise that Spinoza thinks God cannot be the transitive cause of the things he causes. But this is about all he says in the *Ethics* on the subject of immanence. Unfortunately, it doesn't shed much light on God's causality. I think we can do better than that.

Steve Nadler has argued that I can't, consistently with my causal interpretation of the "exists-in" relation, give a satisfying sense to the talk of immanent causation. "An immanent cause," he writes,

is ordinarily understood to be a cause whose effects belong to or are a part of itself (much as the Cartesian mind can be said to be the cause of its own ideas): it is a cause that brings about some state in or within itself. A transitive cause, on the other hand, brings about effects which are ontologically distinct from itself

(as the baseball is the cause of the broken window and the heat of the sun is the cause of the melted ice). It might seem that unless we think of the things causally brought about by God as properties or states of God—that is, unless we adopt the inherence interpretation—we will be unable to explain God’s causation of things as immanent causation, as Spinoza demands.<sup>83</sup>

Nadler criticizes me for saying that God acts on things other than himself.<sup>84</sup> If I understand the statement that “whatever is, is in God” [E1p15] to mean no more than that all things are caused by God, where those things are understood to be “other than God,” I provide “too thin an understanding of the way [...] things are ‘in God’ to support a meaningful sense of immanent causation.”<sup>85</sup>

Now I think that to understand Spinoza we *must* conceive of God’s modes as “other than” God. After all, they’re defined as things which exist *in another*, through which they’re conceived, whereas God is defined as a being which exists *in itself*, and is conceived through itself. So modes are defined by a property inconsistent with the property by which substance is defined. And the “other” in which they are said to exist is substance. *Of course* modes must be other than, distinct from, substance.

Still, it’s certainly true that, however distinct from substance modes may be, they must also be intimately connected with substance. The best way to see that connection, I think, will be to consider the notions of internal constitution, essence, and power. “Internal constitution” is not a term in Spinoza’s technical vocabulary, but it’s clear from two important passages—the Physical Excursus following E2p13s and the Preface to *Short Treatise* Part 2—that Spinoza thought each complex body in nature has a certain internal constitution which makes it the thing it is, and determines that so long as it retains (at least roughly) the same internal constitution, it will persist over time as that individual, with the manifest properties we associate with that individual.<sup>86</sup> This internal constitution consists in the fact that the individual is composed of so and so many simpler bodies, of such and such size, with such and such motions in relation to one another, motions which have such and such degrees of speed. The internal constitution of a thing is what constitutes its essence, in the sense of “essence” defined at E2d2: it is “that which, being given, the thing itself is necessarily given, and which, being taken away, the thing itself is necessarily taken away.” My internal constitution—the particular combination of properties of my component particles which makes me the individual I am—came into being at a certain point in time, and at some later point will pass away. It is vulnerable to assaults from other individuals, as Spinoza says in E4a1:

There is no singular thing in nature than which there is not another more powerful and stronger. Whatever one is given, there is another more powerful by which the first can be destroyed. [E4a1]

Essences of this sort—which I would suggest we identify with the actual essences referred to in E3p7—have a finite, temporal existence.

But Spinoza does not always use the term “essence” [*essentia*] to refer to something which has that kind of fragility. For example, in E1p17s he says that “a man is the cause of the existence of another man, but not of his essence, for the latter is an eternal truth” [C I 427/G II 63, ll. 18–20]. So there’s a sense of “essence” in which the essences of things do not come into being and pass away, but are eternal. Now our model would predict that for any individual there will be a law of nature which says that if an individual has that internal constitution, it will have certain vulnerabilities. For example, if I, constituted as I am, ingest more than 300 milligrams of arsenic in a 24-hour period, I will die very soon. Similarly, failing to drink any water over an extended period would also kill me, though it would probably take longer. These are laws of nature, or at least something very like laws, at least empirical generalizations indicative of the operation of laws whose precise formulation would require more knowledge than I have.<sup>87</sup> E3pr has told us that anything which happens in nature must be explicable in terms of the laws of nature. If what I’ve argued above is correct, laws do not by themselves explain particular events like my death. The laws are conditional in form. To draw particular conclusions from them we also need information about my internal constitution (and the internal constitutions of the objects I encounter). The laws and the information about my constitution and those of surrounding objects are separately necessary and only jointly sufficient to explain a particular event.

I suggest that this is the sort of thing Spinoza has in mind when he says in E2p8 that the *formal* essences of singular things, *or* modes, are contained in God’s attributes. (It’s clear from what he actually says in that passage that he’s having some difficulty articulating his ideas.) I think we should understand the formal essence of a singular thing as the set of laws which govern the interaction of things with its internal constitution with other things which have different internal constitutions. It’s the internal constitution of arsenic which gives it the power to kill me. But that internal constitution would not have those effects if the laws of nature were different than they are (and if my internal constitution were different than it is).

I have linked the concept of the internal constitution of a thing first to the concept of its essence, understood in two different ways, and finally, to the

concept of its powers. Let's focus now on the concept of a thing's power. In the demonstration of E4p4 Spinoza writes:

The power by which singular things—and consequently [any individual] man—preserve their being is the power itself of God, *or* Nature (E1p24c), not insofar as that power [God *or* Nature's] is infinite, but insofar as it can be explained through the man's actual essence (by E3p7). So the man's power, insofar as it is explained through his actual essence, is part of the infinite power of God *or* Nature, i.e. (by E1p34), of its essence. [E4p4d]

In E3pr Spinoza tells us that it's the laws of nature which constitute Nature's power of acting [C I 492/ G II 138, ll. 12–15]. The demonstration of E4p4 adds that Nature's power of acting *is* the power of singular things to preserve themselves *insofar as* their power can be explained through their actual essence. Here's how I take this.

What gives a body with a certain constitution its power to persist in existence are laws of nature which say that a body so constituted will need other things of a certain sort to sustain itself (certain nutrients, say, like water), will survive threats to its existence from bodies of another sort (certain bacteria, perhaps), and succumb to other bodies constituted in a different way (certain poisons, for example). Whether the body actually does survive will depend partly on the laws of its nature, and partly on the existence and powers of the surrounding bodies it encounters. There is, in some sense, an element of chance in all this, but the outcome is determined by the laws of nature, operating in a particular set of circumstances.

The laws of nature dealing with a particular kind of body Spinoza calls its formal essence. Those laws are deducible from the more general laws of nature, so they can be said to be “contained in” them. We cannot say that a particular individual—say, a particular man—is a part of God [E1p13s]. But we can say that that man's power, his capacity to affect others, and liability to be affected by them, is part of the power of God or nature [E4p4d]. And this, I think, is enough to show that modes have a very intimate connection with substance.

My Spinoza thinks there is something eternal and immutable in the world, the laws of nature and the general features of reality they describe, which determine how particular things change from one form to another. It's reasonable to classify him as a pantheist because he thinks those laws and the features they describe are *something pervasive in the world, a part of the world, not something separate from it, but a part whose power is felt everywhere in the world*. And he thinks of that eternal and immutable element in the world as God. It's enough like the God of traditional religion—an uncaused cause of all things, the contemplation of which can be a source of joy to us—to justify our using religious language to

describe it and to make it understandable that we experience religious emotions when we contemplate it. It's not just the uncaused first cause of all things, but a being we can love, once we recognize its existence and role in the world.

## Notes

- 1 Edwin Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).
- 2 Yitzhak Y. Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 3 See, for example, the high praise from Don Garrett, Mogens Lærke, Alan Nelson, and Martin Lin on the back cover of the paperback edition of SMM.
- 4 Melamed is not the only one to display these misunderstandings. In crucial respects he follows Charles Jarrett, "The Concepts of Substance and Mode in Spinoza," *Philosophia* 7, no. 1 (1977): 83–105 and John Carriero, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (1995): 245–273. But he develops the case more fully, and thereby creates more possibility for error.
- 5 W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), 59.
- 6 Neil Wilson, "Substances without Substrata," *Review of Metaphysics* 12, no. 4 (1959): 521–539, here 532.
- 7 Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning" [1967], in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, ed. Donald Davidson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 27 and *passim*. Davidson's notes make clear Quine's influence on him, though it's not clear Quine intended anything as general or as strong as what Davidson argued for.
- 8 For a useful survey of the controversy, see Jane Heal, "Radical Interpretation," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, ed. Bob Hale and Crispin Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).
- 9 For the full context see <http://www.hughhewitt.com/donald-trump-makes-return-visit>.
- 10 See Edwin Curley, "Spinoza's Geometric Method," *Studia Spinozana* 2 (1986): 151–168. Melamed might reply that this article just shows that I had changed my mind about the principle of charity between 1969 and 1986, not that he misunderstood me. (As we'll see, he is wont to do this.) I don't think this response would survive a scrupulous reading of my book. See in particular: SMC, 78–80; SMC, 100–101; and SMC, 155.
- 11 Myself among them. See "Charitable Interpretations and the Political Domestication of Spinoza, or, Benedict in the Land of the Secular Imagination," in *Philosophy and Its History, Aims and Methods in the Study of Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Mogens Lærke, Justin E. H. Smith, and Eric Schliesser (New York:



- Oxford University Press, 2013). Other targets included Jonathan Israel and (of all people!) Jonathan Bennett.
- 12 Cf. SMM, 40–48, with the corresponding pages in Yitzhak Y. Melamed, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics of Substance: The Substance-Mode Relation as a Relation of Inherence and Predication,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 78, no. 1 (2009): 17–82, here 56–62. The conference at which Melamed presented CI was held in Montreal in October 2011. Hence, the conjecture that it represents a later stage of his thought about these issues. To judge by his website he still regards CI as an important statement of principle. See <http://philosophy.jhu.edu/directory/yitzhak-melamed>.
  - 13 Edwin Curley and Gregory Walski, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism Reconsidered,” in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, ed. Rocco J. Gennaro and Charles Huenemann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 242. When the polemical mood is on him, Melamed can be rather free with his paraphrases. His gloss on the passage quoted reads: “Our default attitude should be such that we try to *avoid ascribing radical and implausible* views to great dead philosophers” [my emphasis]. So a prescription to exercise caution in interpretation becomes a prescription to avoid certain kinds of interpretation. And a prescription to exercise care in attributing “tremendously implausible” views to past philosophers becomes a prescription to avoid attributing “radical and implausible” views to past philosophers. Having written that Spinoza’s position on miracles is more interesting than Hume’s because it is more radical, and more radical positions are inherently more interesting than less radical positions, I was somewhat surprised to be accused of a bias against radical interpretations. Cf. Edwin Curley, “Spinoza on miracles,” in *The Proceedings of the First Italian International Congress on Spinoza*, ed. Emilia Giancotti (Urbino: Bibliopolis, 1985).
  - 14 In Curley, “Spinoza’s Geometric Method,” 155–156. The name alludes to an article by Michael R. Ayers, “Substance, Reality, and the Great, Dead Philosophers,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (1970): 38–49.
  - 15 Melamed’s initial comment on this is to suggest that “*no* view should be attributed to *anyone* ‘without pretty strong textual evidence’” [CI, 262]. I think this goes too far. When Descartes writes in the First Meditation that he’s found that the senses sometimes deceive him, this familiar observation is unlikely to make us ask: “Could he *really* believe that?” Nor should it. But when he writes at the beginning of the *Discourse* that good sense is the most equitably distributed thing in the world, that’s exactly the question we should ask. I’ve discussed the latter example in Edwin Curley, “Dialogues with the Dead,” *Synthèse* 67, no. 1 (1986): 33–49.
  - 16 Cf. SMC, 18 and SMM, 40. In emphasizing this passage Melamed is following Jarrett and Carriero. But they thought my mistake was not to deploy the distinction between inherence and predication. I was, of course, aware of that distinction (cf. note 3 on SMC, 161, discussing the controversy between Ackrill and Owen).

- But I thought I could safely disregard it, since I didn't think it enabled us to avoid Bayle's critique. If something inheres in a subject—say, some particular piece of grammatical knowledge—then that particular piece of knowledge may not be predicable of the subject. That is (to deploy Owen's criterion), we cannot say "Pierre is knowledge of how to form the third person plural present of *voir*" or "Pierre is a knowledge of that grammatical point." Still, there will always be a closely related predication we *can* make. For example, "Pierre knows how to form the third person, etc." Melamed seems to agree that the distinction is no help in this context.
- 17 Cf. Pierre Bayle, "Spinoza," Remarque N, in the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. Bayle's complete *Dictionnaire* is available online in the University of Chicago's ARTFL project at <https://artfl-project.uchicago.edu/content/dictionnaire-de-bayle>. The text is that of the 5th edition, 1740. I translate from and make my page references to this edition, but also give references to three useful volumes of selections: Pierre Bayle, *Pour une histoire critique de la philosophie*, ed. Jean-Michel Gros (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2001); Pierre Bayle, *Ecrits sur Spinoza*, ed. Françoise Charles-Daubert and Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: Berg International Editeurs, 1983); Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, ed. Richard Popkin (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965). This quotation comes from vol. IV, 261, of the fifth edition [= 569–570 in Gros, 67 in Charles-Daubert and Moreau, and 309–310 in Popkin]. Charles-Daubert and Moreau is particularly helpful because it includes passages about Spinoza in articles from the *Dictionnaire* other than the article on Spinoza as well as passages from works other than the *Dictionnaire*, including the correspondence.
- 18 Not all predicative interpretations make this assumption. Bennett's doesn't. By positing that the property would be a different property, he avoids some of the difficulties Bayle encounters. See Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1984), §23. But this has its own disadvantages, as I've argued in Edwin Curley, "On Bennett's Interpretation of Spinoza's Monism," in *God and Nature in Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1991).
- 19 See, for instance, TTP, ch. ii, §§24–55, or E2p3s, or Ep. 54 and Ep. 56.
- 20 Here I concentrate on Melamed's argument in the first paragraph on SMM, 35. Subsequently he proposes an alternative reading of Bayle, which makes the argument depend on Spinoza's claim that God is indivisible. I'm not persuaded by his interpretation of Bayle, but I won't pursue that issue here.
- 21 Steven Nadler made a similar move in *Spinoza's Ethics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 78.
- 22 Negations are trickier. "Peter *qua* Romanian citizen cannot vote in Polish elections" translates into "It's not the case that Peter's being a Romanian citizen entitles him to vote in Polish elections."
- 23 On Spinoza's early education in traditional Jewish theology, and his disillusionment with it, see the Preface to his *Opera posthuma*, written by his friends Jarig Jelles and Lodewijk Meyer. See the photographic reprint edition of Spinoza's *Opera*

*posthuma*, ed. Pina Totaro (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2008), 3. Steven Nadler and I are collaborating on a third volume of *The Collected Works* which will contain a translation of the OP preface.

- 24 For example, in Ep. 2, where Spinoza derives the definition of God he will use in the *Ethics* from the definition of God as a supremely perfect being [C I 165/G IV 7–8]; or Ep. 35, where he insists at length on God's perfection [C II 27/G IV 182]; or E1p33s2 [C I 436–438/G II 74–76]. In correspondence Melamed writes: "Spinoza rejects the definition of God as supremely perfect in Ep. 60." True. But it's one thing to say that *perfection should not be used to define God*, and quite another thing to say that *God is not perfect*.
- 25 C I 428–429/G II 65.
- 26 See C II 610–612.
- 27 Clearest, I think, is E1p4d; but see also: KV, I, ch. vii, §10; Ep. 2; Ep. 9; E1p10; and E1p19. Cf. SMC, 16–18. Though I hadn't known Gueroult's work when I reached this conclusion in SMC, when I did discover it, I was pleased to learn that he had independently reached the same conclusion. See Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza 1: Dieu* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968), 47–56. And on E1p20c2, see Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, 300–308, 344. If Melamed wishes to challenge my conclusions on these points, he needs also to deal with Gueroult's arguments.
- 28 See CM II, ch. iv. But that's not actually the line Melamed takes. He apparently thinks that at this stage of his development Spinoza agreed with Descartes that God is immutable, and held that God cannot have any modes [SMM, 38]. Since Spinoza clearly thinks in the *Short Treatise* that God has modes (e.g., in KV, I, ch. ii, §21–22), this reading of the CM makes Spinoza vacillate on what we might have thought was a pretty fundamental point.
- 29 SMM, 39n116. Similarly Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 78.
- 30 For example, in KV, I, ch. i, §2 & KV, I, ch. i, §9; KV, I, ch. ii, §29; KV, I, ch. iv, §3 & KV, I, ch. iv, §7; KV, I, ch. vii, §6 & KV, I, ch. vii, note a; KV, II, ch. xiv, §4; KV, II, ch. xxiii, §2; and KV, II, ch. xxiv, §2. No doubt it's fair to discount early texts when they contradict later ones. But when they consistently say the same thing as the later texts, the proper conclusion would seem to be that they articulate a fundamental doctrine.
- 31 See the argument drawn from Akkerman's work in C I 405–6.
- 32 In the discussion of a paper Melamed presented at Princeton in May 2017 he granted that the *Theological-Political Treatise* counts as a late text.
- 33 SMM, 17–20. Other Spinoza scholars have also made this move. Cf. Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 83.
- 34 See my discussion of *quatenus* in C II 612. Sometimes Melamed shows himself to be aware of this ambiguity. See SMM, 53n. But he doesn't seem to have considered its implications for his argument here.

- 35 Though his phrasing varies, that's the way Melamed generally seems to understand pantheism. Cf. SMM, 10, 17, 20, 25, and 47. And this is a common way of understanding pantheism. See Keith Yandell, "Pantheism," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Online 2017 Edition), ed. Tim Crane. Available online at: <https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/pantheism/v-1>.
- 36 See Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza* (London: Penguin, 1951), 54.
- 37 For example, Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Necessitarianism," in *God and Nature Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 191–192, and Michael Griffin, in "Necessitarianism in Spinoza and Leibniz," in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, ed. Charlie Huenemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- 38 Bayle, "Chrysippe," Remarque S, in *Dictionnaire* [II, 174; Gros, 126; Charles-Daubert and Moreau, 122; not in Popkin]. It's striking how similar what Bayle says about Spinoza's necessitarianism is to what he says about his monism. He treats both as manifestly false, contrary to what is most evident to us.
- 39 As Griffin makes clear in "Necessitarianism in Spinoza and Leibniz." Arguably Leibniz is more necessitarian than Spinoza. If you think of possible worlds in abstraction from the God who might create them, there are many. But given God's existence and nature, only one world is really possible.
- 40 G. W. F. Leibniz, "Ad sententiam Spinozae de necessitate rerum," *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe, Philosophische Schriften*, VI, iv, #338, 1777. When I first wrote on this topic, this fragment had not been published. I'm indebted to Ursula Goldenbaum for calling it to my attention.
- 41 See SMC, 83–84, where I made an objection similar to Bayle's, but did not treat it as decisive, just a reason to wonder how Spinoza might have justified his claim that nothing is contingent.
- 42 I believe I originally got this idea from Carnap's notion of a state description and not directly from Leibniz. See Rudolf Carnap, *Introduction to Semantics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), 101ff. But Leibniz was Carnap's inspiration, and Leibniz's discussion of possible worlds at the end of the *Théodicée* [§§405–417], which gives it a clear temporal dimension, seems a better model.
- 43 This is, at least, one common way of understanding determinism. Cf. Lawrence Sklar's article on determinism in *A Companion to Metaphysics*, ed. Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa, 1st edn (London: Blackwell, 1995).
- 44 See J. R. Milton, "Laws of Nature," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), vol. 1, 680–701. Cf. SMC, 79. See also Edwin Curley, "Law of Nature," in *Cambridge Descartes Lexicon*, ed. Lawrence Nolan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
- 45 See also TTP, ch. vi, §§7–12. I've slightly modified the translation in C II.

- 46 See TTP, ch. iv, §§1–2 [C II 125–126/G III 57–58] where Spinoza defines a “law,” understood in the most general sense, as “that according to which each individual, or all, or some members of the same species, act in one and the same fixed and determinate way.” This definition is intended to cover both human laws and the laws of nature. As examples of the latter Spinoza cites universal statements about all bodies or all human beings. But he explicitly allows for generalizations about *some* members of a species. And I think his definition should also be understood as allowing statements which identify regularities in the behavior of particular individuals to qualify as laws. More on this below.
- 47 See, for example, TTP, ch. iv, §§1–2, where Spinoza maintains that the laws of nature follow from the nature or definition of a thing.
- 48 The most notable defender of a necessitarian view, I think, was William Kneale, *Probability and Induction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949). For a mid-century defense of the Humean view which gives a good statement of the arguments then made in its favor, see A. J. Ayer, “What Is a Law of Nature?,” in *The Concept of a Person: And Other Essays* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1963). I believe necessitarian views of laws are more common now. But writing as recently as 1977, Parkinson felt able to dismiss Spinoza’s critique of miracles as depending on a “widely rejected” necessitarian view. See G. H. R. Parkinson, “Spinoza on miracles and natural law,” *Revue internationale de philosophie* 31, no. 119/120 (1977): 145–157.
- 49 The best suggestion I’ve seen is Garrett’s: that Spinoza would have thought possible worlds which are not actual were excluded by the principle that whatever series of finite modes exists must express the highest degree of reality and perfection. See Garrett, “Spinoza’s Necessitarianism,” 197. Garrett does not claim that Spinoza ever states this principle, but argues that the connection Spinoza makes between an entity’s degree of reality or perfection and its existence [E1p9 and E1p11] makes it likely that he would have accepted it. I have some difficulty understanding how this constraint is supposed to operate. On a typical theistic view, like Leibniz’s, where an omnipotent personal agent, God, created the world at a particular time in the past, by an act of will which had no preconditions (*ex nihilo*), then it’s easy to see how God’s choice might have been constrained by his preference for a particular kind of world. But that’s typical theism, not Spinoza. If God’s causality operates in the way I have claimed that it does, that is, if his governance consists in the operation of universal laws of nature, where the causal effectiveness of laws presupposes the prior existence of certain conditions, then it’s difficult to see how Garrett’s principle could determine what happens.
- 50 CM I, ch. vi [C I 312/G I 246]. If the *Metaphysical Thoughts* seems a suspicious source to cite, on the ground that it’s just an exposition of Scholastic and Cartesian ideas, we can reply that the *Ethics* expresses a similar view in E1a6.

- 51 See Bertrand Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* [1919] (New York: Routledge, 2010) or Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* [1921], trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2014). Recently the term “truthmaker” has gained some currency. This seems to be usefully non-committal about the precise details of the ontology. See, for example, Marian David, “The Correspondence Theory of Truth,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2016 Edition). Available online at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/truth-correspondence/>.
- 52 In thinking of what I was doing as hypothetical in this way, I saw it as analogous to what Wolfson did in Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Process of His Reasoning*, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), which provided my first introduction to the secondary literature on Spinoza, in a seminar Bernard Peach taught at Duke in the fall of 1962. Wolfson seemed to argue as follows: suppose we understand the technical terms of Spinoza's philosophy (like “existing in”) to mean such-and-such (say, “being in as an individual essence is in its genus”); do we get the right results? The “right” result here is, not necessarily one which makes Spinoza say something *true*, but one which leads to consequences he would have accepted. For example, Wolfson claimed it as a virtue of his interpretation that it explained why Spinoza would say that substance is prior in nature to its modes. My main objection to Wolfson was not that his procedure was misguided, but that often it yielded the wrong results (defined as results Spinoza would not have accepted), such as the conclusion that “Spinoza's substance is inconceivable, and its essence undefinable and hence unknowable” [Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 1, 76].
- 53 Cf. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 2.061, 5.136, 6.37.
- 54 Notably in Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* [1813], trans. E. F. J. Payne (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1974), which appealed to Spinoza's frequent use of the expression *causa sive ratio*—e.g., in E1p11d2—and his use of logical language to describe causal relations—e.g., in E1p16, E1p17s, and E1p21-E1p23.
- 55 See Kenneth Clatterbaugh, “Cartesian Causality, Explanation, and Divine Concurrence,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 12, no. 2 (1995): 195–207. Clatterbaugh was moved to attribute this conception of causality to Descartes partly by his treatment of the laws of nature as causes in the *Principles of Philosophy* II, §37, a text which was also on my mind in SMC. (I was also influenced by Hampshire's discussion of causality in Spinoza. See Hampshire, *Spinoza*, 35.)
- 56 This should not surprise us. If the *Short Treatise* shows anything, it shows that Spinoza talked about efficient causation in ways that would have seemed very strange to Aristotle. Cf. KV, I, ch. iii [C I 80/G I 34–35].

- 57 I take the example from J. L. Mackie, "Causes and Conditions," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1965): 245–264.
- 58 Since I devoted an entire chapter of SMC to the concept of God's causality, and *never* described God's relation to his modes as one of efficient causation—indeed, emphasized how unusual the conception of causality I attributed to Spinoza seemed [SMC, 76–77]—I was surprised to read, in an early draft of Melamed's first chapter, that I interpreted the causal relation between substance and its modes as one of efficient causation. I wrote to Melamed to protest this misunderstanding. So I was even more surprised, when I read the final version [SMM, 4n], to find him rejecting my attempt at correction, and insisting that when I wrote SMC, I did too understand God's causality as efficient causality. He presented my protest as reflecting a change of mind, not acknowledged as such. I'm not impressed by his attempt to provide evidence for this reading. But I can see that it serves his larger purposes, as will become clear later.
- 59 My account of Descartes requires an understanding of his creation doctrine not universally accepted. I claim that Descartes held that the laws of nature were necessary truths and that the breakthrough he thought he had achieved in 1630 was to see how the necessity of those laws could be reconciled with God's creation of them. One motivation for his view that we should think of the eternal truths as like a king's laws was a concern about explaining the truth of general propositions whose subject terms have no instances. I've argued this in some detail in the articles cited below. Here I'll simply cite the *Discours*, where Descartes summarizes what he claimed to have accomplished in *Le monde*: "I showed what the laws of nature were, and without basing my arguments on any principle other than the infinite perfections of God, I tried to demonstrate all those laws about which we could have any doubt, and to show that even if God created many worlds, there could be none in which these laws were not observed" [CSM I 132/AT VI 43]. See Edwin Curley, "Descartes on the Creation of the Eternal Truths," *Philosophical Review* 93, no. 4 (1984): 569–597, and Curley, "Law of Nature."
- 60 Hampshire, *Spinoza*, 47. In SMC, 167 I acknowledged my indebtedness to Hampshire in a note. In retrospect I think I should have been more emphatic about his influence, which now seems to me more considerable than I had realized.
- 61 Believing that the attributes are the primary locus of God's causality, when I first read Gueroult, I found the following observation very congenial: "L'attribut n'est rien d'autre qu'une substance en chair et en os, révélée dans ce qui constitue sa nature propre." See Gueroult, *Spinoza* 1, 47.
- 62 Another case where I was indebted to Hampshire. Cf. Hampshire, *Spinoza*, 86.
- 63 Cf. SMC, 155–158.
- 64 Spinoza's interest in, and sympathy for, this project is indicated by the fact that when he undertook to teach Casarius the Cartesian philosophy he chose Parts II



- and III of Descartes's *Principles* as the place to begin. See Meyer's Preface to DPP [C I 227/G I 129–130], and Ep. 13 to Oldenburg [C I 207].
- 65 C I 458–462/G II 97–102. That this idea goes back to the earliest stages of Spinoza's thought seems indicated by his discussion of the infinite modes in the *Short Treatise*, where he says that the discussion of motion—named there as the only universal mode we know in matter—“belongs more properly to a treatise on natural science.” I think Ep. 83 shows that in the end Spinoza was dissatisfied with what he had been able to do in physics. I suppose he was right to be, since his initial ambitions seem to have been based on the assumption that physics would be much easier than it turned out to be.
- 66 This is not to say that Melamed is wrong to argue that there are infinitely many infinite modes in each attribute [SMM, 119–120]. That's a dramatic reversal of previous thought on the topic, which has generally supposed that each attribute produced only two infinite modes, one immediate, the other mediate. I think the traditional interpretation rests on very slender textual evidence (mainly cryptic statements in Ep. 64), and that Melamed is probably right to draw this conclusion. However: even if there are infinitely many infinite modes under a given attribute, the series of causes leading back from any one infinite mode to the first cause must be finite. Analogy: the axioms of Euclidean geometry have infinitely many consequences. But the deductive path from any theorem back to the axioms is, and must be, finite.
- 67 See TTP, ch. ii, §§27–28; TTP, ch. vi, §§14–15; and Spinoza's comments on Boyle's experiments with nitre in Ep. 13.
- 68 This is a conclusion I initially reached because I was wondering how to reconcile E1p26, which proclaims that an infinite being, God, is the cause of all things, with E1p28, which proclaims that the cause of any finite thing must be an infinite series of finite things [SMC, 62–64]. I find this idea also in Gueroult, when he talks about the “double determination” of finite modes in Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, 338–339. Bennett seems to have essentially accepted this picture in Bennett, *A Study*, 113. Is it possible to accept this interpretation of Spinoza's theory of divine causality and yet reject my conclusions about his necessitarianism? Only, I think, by making Spinoza inconsistent on a central point of his philosophy.
- 69 Melamed writes in similar terms at SMM, 6, and in CI. I don't understand why he thinks his account of Spinoza's definition is “more literal” than mine. Perhaps this is an illegitimate extension from debates about whether scripture should be interpreted literally or figuratively.
- 70 See Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 1, 72.
- 71 DPP1d5 [C I 239/G I 150] and DPP2d2 [C I 262/G I 181]. In SMC I spent several pages calling attention to the two definitions of substance in Descartes [SMC, 6–11], ending with a brief comment that in his geometric exposition of Descartes, Spinoza showed



- himself aware of the ambiguity in Cartesian usage. Perhaps I should have said that more emphatically.
- 72 Here again I find a kindred spirit in Gueroult, whose Spinoza was opposed to scholastic conceptions of substance according to which being *in se* signified only non-inherence. Instead being *in se* was to be understood as being by itself, a being which could not owe its being to another [Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, 44–45.] Gueroult's Spinoza has completed the metamorphosis of traditional notions of substance which Descartes began, translating the notions of being *in se* and *in alio* in terms of causality [Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, 63.] I didn't know his work when I wrote SMC, but I now think the fact that we arrived independently at similar conceptions of the mode-substance relation is significant confirmation of my interpretation.
- 73 I use the notions of an adequate and a partial cause in senses modeled on those explained in E3d1, which I would gloss as follows: an adequate cause is one whose effect can be deduced from that cause alone; a partial cause is one whose effect cannot be deduced from that cause alone, but can be deduced from it in conjunction with other causes.
- 74 Lately I've also argued for my view by citing the exchange between Spinoza and van Velthuysen, in Ep. 42– Ep. 43, where Spinoza seems to react with great indignation at Van Velthuysen's accusation that he takes the universe itself to be God [cf. C II 375/G IV 208 ll. 28–35 and C II 388/G IV 223 ll. 22–25].
- 75 In SMM, 113–114, Melamed poses this as an unsolved problem in Spinoza interpretation, dismissing my solution in a brief note. Readers might wonder whether he gives as good an answer.
- 76 KV, I, ch. ix, §1; Ep. 64. In Ep. 64 Spinoza also gives “the face of the whole universe” as an example of an infinite mode which follows from the absolute nature of an attribute by the mediation of some infinite mode which follows from the attribute immediately. Some Spinoza scholars take this language to indicate that the whole of nature, identified in E2le7 as an individual consisting of all bodies [G II 101–102], is also an infinite mode in the attribute of extension. Cf. SMM, 136; Garrett, “Spinoza's Necessitarianism,” 198; and Nadler, *Spinoza's Ethics*, 104–108. For an alternative reading, see my note on “*face*” in C II 629–630, the annotation of Ep. 64 [C II 439], and SMC, 61. Treating the face of the whole universe as identical with the totality of bodies creates the problem of explaining how a whole can follow from the absolute nature of one of God's attributes (by E1p23) when none of its component parts does (by E1p28d). This is as if we were to say that the owners of a baseball team could put together a team (a whole constituted by the players, coaches and manager, and their relations to one another) without entering into contracts with any of the players, coaches, or manager. (It also seems to me somewhat awkward that some of these authors should treat the whole of nature as identical both with God and with one of his infinite attributes.)

- 77 I take it that this is the truth which underlies the objections of interpreters like Hegel and Joachim, who hold that Spinoza must deny the reality of the finite. See, for example, G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, 3 vols (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), vol. 3, sect. 2, ch. 1, A2. See also Harold H. Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), 107–119.
- 78 See C I 624, 661 and C II, 613, 666.
- 79 See Curley, “On Bennett’s Interpretation of Spinoza’s Monism,” 51. Similarly in Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), 142, I say that I “must have known” that this evidence existed because SMC frequently referred to other passages near it in the TIE.
- 80 Variations on this theme also occur on SMM, 25 and 28.
- 81 For example, that because Leibniz visited Spinoza in The Hague in late 1676, had been prepared for that interview by Tschirnhaus, and had an opportunity to read the manuscript of the *Ethics* there, and to discuss it with Spinoza, that it’s “very unlikely” he misunderstood Spinoza. Spinoza’s system is not that easy to understand, and Leibniz would have had many issues he wanted to discuss in a limited time. What he wrote about the *Ethics* later, after he had a copy of the *Opera posthuma* to consult at his leisure, contains clear misunderstandings. See SMC, 14–18.
- 82 That “pantheism” is sometimes used thus broadly is supported by the OED and by Keith Yandell’s account in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- 83 See Steven Nadler, “‘Whatever is, is in God’: substance and things in Spinoza’s metaphysics,” in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, ed. Charlie Huenemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 61.
- 84 Ibid., 64, citing Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 38.
- 85 Ibid., 63.
- 86 See the definition of a (composite) individual at C I 460 [G II 99, l. 26—G II 100, l. 5], and KV, II, pref. [C I 94–96/G I 51, l. 16—G I 52, l. 40]. I say “at least roughly” because the passage in the *Short Treatise* suggests that the individual may retain its identity, in spite of some variation in its internal constitution, so long as the variation remains within certain limits. This conception of essence addresses only the continuing identity of the individual thing over time. It does not exclude the possibility that there might be two distinct individuals with the same internal constitution. In articulating this view Spinoza declares his commitment to the new, mechanical philosophy, a commitment also shown in his correspondence with Oldenburg regarding Boyle’s experiments with nitre. See Ep. 6, and particularly C I 178–179/G IV 25, l. 5—G IV 26, l. 3.
- 87 I don’t know much about either my internal constitution or that of arsenic. But I imagine that with information about both these things a very good scientist might come up with a precise formulation of the underlying law.

# A Response: On Spinoza, Possible Worlds, and Pantheism

Pierre-François Moreau

Before commenting directly on Edwin Curley's important contribution, I would like to formulate three broader remarks.

Edwin Curley was, if not the very first, one of the first American Spinozists to enter into discussion with European, and in particular French, Spinozists. There was a very long period during which Spinoza specialists from different countries could hardly recognize one another. I'm not even sure whether they read one another. After the Second World War, which saw the disappearance of the *Societas Spinozana*, Spinoza research was pursued in each country in isolation. Then, about forty years ago, in 1977, the tricentennial Spinoza conferences at last gave Spinoza specialists a chance to meet one another, and in meeting one another, to read one another and to discuss Spinoza with one another. It was at this moment that the French discovered Emilia Giancotti of Italy, Manfred Walther and Wolfgang Bartuschat of Germany, Hubertus G. Hubbeling and Guido van Suchtelen of the Netherlands, and Edwin Curley of the United States. Since then, various colloquia, conferences, and publications have kept this link alive. For Spinozists of the following generations, it has become entirely natural to develop their research within a global framework. But it is important to recall that this wasn't always the way things were. Curley contributed to ending the period of isolation thanks to his repeated trips to Europe, thanks to his participation in many international discussions, and thanks to his organizing the memorable 1986 international Spinoza conference in Chicago. That he be publicly thanked for all of this.

Since I already find myself writing on the subject of times long past, let us return to 1969, the date of publication of Curley's book *Spinoza's Metaphysics*.

I find it remarkable that the chapter he has contributed to this volume takes up an analysis that he began with that book, and that it is marked by its effort to formulate, in an even more convincing manner, the theses that have since raised the greatest objections. It appears to me that one can see in such a return to a discussion begun about fifty years ago, and in the patient reconstruction and re-composition of the arguments, something not so common in the historiography of philosophy: the seriousness of the work of thought. If that which was said had a meaning, and if this meaning has not been compromised, it follows that it is worth taking back up the themes, redefining the terms, weighing the distinctions, all in order to see if the interpretation can be defended or not. We want to know whether the interpretation does in fact allow us to advance in our understanding of Spinoza's thought and his relation to the world, whether his world or our own. At stake with this insistence is the patience of the concept at work.

Multiple times in his chapter, Curley mentions his relation to logical positivism, as well as to other twentieth-century philosophical doctrines. He recalls that he tried to separate that which he found unacceptable (in brief, the logical positivists' dismissal of past philosophers as simply absurd), from that which he found acceptable (their skeptical attitude with regard to traditional metaphysics—in other words, their belief that traditional metaphysical preoccupations and modes of demonstration were in need of further elucidation). Curley also indicates the fundamental principle of his anti-positivism, namely, that to understand contemporary debates, it is necessary to understand the dialectical process that creates the very terms of these debates. In other words, Curley underlines a nodal point in the epistemology of the history of ideas that which one writes on a controversy of the past is also determined by a controversy of the present. It seems to me that by paying attention to the conditions of enunciation of historiographical works we adopt an extremely productive approach for making sense of the meaning of debates in the history of philosophy. While the past may be the subconscious of the present, it's also the present that chooses the questions we ask of the past.

I will now turn to the discussion of Curley's paper properly speaking.

First off, I would like to take a closer look at the question of necessitarianism and possible worlds in connection with Spinoza and his reception. Let us look at the passage from Pierre Bayle that Leibniz quotes. The passage concerns the coherence (or, rather, incoherence) of Stoic philosophy: Chrysippus did not accept Diodorus Cronus's necessitarian position, and, according to Bayle, he is wrong to not accept it, since the necessitarian position is coherent with his own conception of destiny. This incoherence is explained, according to Bayle, by Chrysippus's

recoiling before the “odious and frightful” (“*odieuses et affreuses*”) moral consequences of the doctrine. (One can recognize here, in passing, a tendency of Bayle to re-write philosophies using simplifications resorted to in the name of common sense, rather than respecting the philosophies’ own architectures.) Just as soon, Bayle moves on to discussing Spinozism—and there, the “embarrassment” of the disciples takes the place of the incoherence of the master:

Je crois que les Stoïciens s'engagèrent à donner plus d'étendue aux choses possibles qu'aux choses futures, afin d'adoucir les conséquences odieuses et affreuses que l'on tirait de leur dogme de la fatalité. C'est un grand embarras pour les spinozistes, que de voir que selon leur hypothèse il a été aussi impossible de toute éternité que Spinoza, par exemple, ne mourût pas à la Haye, qu'il est impossible que deux et deux soient six. Ils sentent bien que c'est une conséquence nécessaire de leur doctrine, et une conséquence qui rebute, qui effarouche, qui soulève les esprits par l'absurdité qu'elle renferme, diamétralement opposée au sens commun. Ils ne sont pas bien aises que l'on sache qu'ils renversent une doctrine aussi universelle, aussi évidente que celle-ci: *Tout ce qui implique contradiction est impossible, et tout ce qui n'implique point contradiction est possible*. Or quelle contradiction y aurait-il en ce que Spinoza serait mort à Leyde? La Nature aurait-elle été moins parfaite, moins sage, moins puissante ? [Bayle, “Chrysippe,” Remarque S, in *Dictionnaire*]<sup>1</sup>

One can immediately notice that Bayle is confusing here a logical contradiction with a factual impossibility: nothing in Spinoza's doctrine allows for assimilating the one to the other, and this confusion evidently renders Bayle's argument inefficacious. But I am not the first to point this out: Leibniz himself underlines this, just after citing the passage from Bayle; and, therefore, Leibniz does not entirely embrace Bayle's argument, though Leibniz does write: “Let us oppose to him [Spinoza] these writings of Bayle, which are sufficiently [*assez*] to my liking.” Everything is in the “sufficiently.” In effect, Leibniz continues:

On peut dire de M. Bayle: *Ubi bene nemo melius* quoiqu'on ne puisse pas dire de lui ce qu'on disait d'Origène: *Ubi male nemo pejus* ... Cependant M. Bayle gâte un peu ce qu'il a dit avec tant de raison: *Or quelle contradiction y aurait-il à ce que Spinoza fût mort à Leyde ? La nature aurait-elle été moins parfaite, moins sage, moins puissante ?*—Il confond ici ce qui est impossible parce qu'il implique contradiction, avec ce qui ne saurait arriver parce qu'il n'est pas propre à être choisi. Il est vrai qu'il n'y aurait point eu de contradiction dans la supposition que Spinoza fût mort à Leyde, et non pas à La Haye; il n'y avait rien de si possible: la chose était donc indifférente par rapport à la puissance de Dieu. Mais il ne faut pas s'imaginer qu'aucun événement, quelque petit qu'il soit, puisse être conçu comme indifférent par rapport à sa sagesse et à sa bonté. [*Théodicée*, §174]<sup>2</sup>

This is not a game with only two positions: Spinoza the necessitarian against Bayle and Leibniz, partisans of the possible. Rather, this game has three positions: Spinoza, for whom there is, ontologically, nothing possible; Bayle, for whom all things non-contradictory, and thus possible, have an equal right to exist; and Leibniz, for whom these non-contradictory entities are certainly equivalent from the point of view of divine power, but not from the point of view of divine wisdom. In other words, for Leibniz, there very well are possible worlds, but there is also a choice to be made among these possible worlds—which means that, from the point of view of the best world, there could not have been another world than this world. To put things bluntly, this amounts to rehashing in a finalistic language that which Spinoza enounced without resorting to finality.

It remains to be seen why this detour was made. Hypothesis: Spinoza and Leibniz were reasoning within a world—the world of Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Descartes—which physics was in the process of unifying by showing (at least potentially) that all phenomena can be explained by the necessity of mechanical laws. At this point, two solutions offer themselves up: one accepts, in a materialist manner, the necessity inherent in the world, like Hobbes and Spinoza; or, rather, in order to maintain divine choice, one extracts the necessity of the world and puts this necessity, without saying it explicitly, between worlds—that which makes for the hypothesis of the best of all possible worlds, a hypothesis which Spinoza, had he known it, would have considered the Leibnizian swindle.

It remains furthermore to be noted that Spinoza never speaks of possible worlds, even as means of denying their existence: this lexicon is Leibniz's. Why? To consider that possibles form a "world" or "worlds" is to believe that we can, without regard to real experience, account for the coherence of some causal laws that would be without any efficaciousness. This is thus speculation, which comes with our ignorance of our own situation and of the complicated chain of real events, and wherein we imagine, by means of each of these fictions, that a world is ready to pass into existence as soon as the divine wisdom designates it as the best. In other words, as soon as we speak about some "possible world," we are placed on Leibniz's terrain; logically, we are then led to think that there are many of them, since we have by the force of our imagination cleaned the slate of anything that might oppose their existence.

We can in this same way understand why Spinoza, having already opposed the possible in the domain of ontology, permits himself to resuscitate the possible in the domain of the philosophy of action, namely, precisely because the register of action is ignorance. In the inter-human ethical world, where laws are not any

the less necessary but where we must take decisions while still ignorant of the complex interactions among the effects of these laws, we need to make use of the notion of the possible. This is why Spinoza can talk of what is possible, without contradiction, in *Ethics* Part 4.

I now turn to the question of Spinoza's so-called pantheism. The term, as is well known, was coined by John Toland and not by Spinoza himself. It has a rich ulterior history, both during the period of German Idealism and in France with the polemics surrounding Victor Cousin and his eclectic school that shaped an important part of nineteenth-century intellectual history.<sup>3</sup> But discussion of the term points to a larger quarrel concerning a certain number of doctrines, including Spinozism, which have been read as dissolving the world in God. These doctrines would grant such a prominent place to God's power, and such a small place to creatures' powers outside of their connection to God, that the latter would have practically no reality of their own and their existence would be, at bottom, but an illusion. Curley shows very clearly that this doctrine is not Spinoza's own—and I would add, for my part: on the contrary, Spinoza is a thinker of finitude; the infinite, for Spinoza, is a means to think the finite in the most positive way possible. Nevertheless, certain interpretations of Spinoza's doctrine risk leading to such a reading. The essential point is establishing what is meant by *the absolute power of God*. With respect to finite events and things, this absolute power only exercises itself by the intermediary of the interactions of finite things, and these very interactions secure the ontological weight and perfection of each finite thing. It is the capacity to affect and to be affected that allows for distinguishing among finite things; likewise, the fact that the human body, by its complexity, possesses this double capacity to affect and to be affected to a very high degree confers onto it its specificity, to which corresponds the specificity of the *mens humana*.

This does not mean that Spinoza always elucidated to the same degree the specificity of his own doctrine on this point. Rather, we may wish to follow Alexandre Matheron's reading, for whom Spinoza's thought became more and more Spinozist over time, from the *Short Treatise*, the least difficult of Spinoza's text to pull toward pantheism, just until the ultimate exposition of the system in the first chapters of the *Tractatus Politicus*, where it appears, truly, as an ontology of the power of finite things.

Once more, it is to Edwin Curley that we owe our reflections on such essential questions.

## Notes

- 1 "I believe the Stoics resolved to give more extent to possible than to future things in order to soften the odious and frightful consequences which were drawn from their doctrine of fatality. Today it's a great embarrassment for the Spinozists that according to their hypothesis it's been as impossible from all eternity that Spinoza not die in The Hague as it would be for two and two to make six. They know very well that this is a necessary consequence of their teaching, which shocks people, and puts them off, because it involves an absurdity diametrically opposed to common sense. They're not very happy for us to know that they're overturning a maxim as universal, as evident, as this: *That whatever implies a contradiction is impossible, and whatever does not imply a contradiction is possible*. What contradiction would there have been in supposing that Spinoza died in Leiden? Would Nature have been less perfect, less wise, less powerful?" [Translator's note: Our translation.]
- 2 "We may say about Mr. Bayle: '*Ubi bene nemo melius*' [where he is good, none is better], though we may not say, as was said about Origen: '*Ubi male nemo pejus*' [where he is wrong, bad, none is worse].... However, Bayle spoils a bit that which he had said so rightly: 'What contradiction would there have been in supposing that Spinoza died in Leiden? Would Nature have been less perfect, less wise, less powerful?'—Here, Bayle confuses that which is impossible because it implies a contradiction, with that which cannot come to pass, because it is not proper to be chosen. It is true that there would not have been a contradiction if Spinoza had died in Leiden and not in The Hague. Nothing was more possible: the outcome was thus indifferent with regards to God's power. But we must not imagine that any event, no matter how small, can be conceived indifferently with regards to God's wisdom and goodness." [Translator's note: Our translation.]
- 3 In his early years, Cousin flirts with pantheism. Later, under attack by the Catholics (see, for example, Henri Louis Charles Maret's 1840 *Essai sur le panthéisme dans les sociétés modernes*), Cousin takes his distance, all the while still trying to distinguish between two sorts of pantheisms: a pantheism that would absorb God into the world (and, therefore, moves toward materialism) and a pantheism that would absorb the world into God, as is the case with the mystics. and with Spinoza: "Spinoza is an Indian guru, a Persian Sufi, an enthusiastic monk." See esp. Cousin's 1826 *Fragments philosophiques*.





# The Elusiveness of the One and the Many in Spinoza: Substance, Attribute, and Mode

Michael Della Rocca

Different dimensions of idealism, it might be thought, shape Spinoza's work. Perhaps the most fundamental is the strand of idealism according to which all that exists is somehow dependent on thought.<sup>1</sup> Such an idealism, I have argued, is more or less dictated by Spinoza's commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, a thesis which I unapologetically see as providing the key to much of Spinoza's thought.<sup>2</sup>

I should like here, however, to focus on two other strands of idealism or apparent strands that might be found in Spinoza. These possible strands are, as we will see, connected to the fundamental kind of idealism that I just identified, and they are particularly important because they bring to the fore the subtlety and ingenuity of Spinoza's conception of number and of the alleged difference between the one and the many.

The first of these other strands of idealism concerns the attributes of substance. On this view, contrary to what many interpreters have thought, the attributes are not many but are, rather, the same; there is no distinction among the attributes, no genuine multiplicity. Instead, any distinction here is some kind of illusion, somehow dependent on our minds, and not reflective of any actual differentiation in the substance. This appeal to the mind-dependence of any distinction among the attributes shows that this strand of idealism is in keeping with the general and fundamental view that all things are thought-dependent.

This kind of idealism is found prominently in Hegel's interpretation of Spinoza and in Hegelian interpreters such as Harold Joachim and other British Idealists.<sup>3</sup> This reading is also widely associated with the so-called subjectivist

view of the attributes, a view prominently espoused by Harry Wolfson.<sup>4</sup> There has been much criticism of the subjectivist view in the literature,<sup>5</sup> and this is not surprising for there is substantial, apparent textual evidence against such a reading. I too have taken a ride on this anti-Wolfson bandwagon.<sup>6</sup> But here one of my goals is to atone for my unfair objections and to identify what is right (and what is wrong) in Wolfson's interpretation.

The second particular strand of idealism also turns on an alleged differentiation within substance. Here the apparent differentiation concerns not attributes but modes. On the standard realist, non-idealist view, modes are genuinely different from other modes. On a non-realist, idealist understanding of modes, the distinction among modes is, again, illusory and somehow mind-dependent. This understanding of modes is to be found in the so-called acosmist reading of Spinoza in Maimon and in Hegel and in followers of Hegel among Spinoza commentators. I have already come out in favor of such a reading of Spinoza in various papers.<sup>7</sup> Here I will argue for such a reading through new and previously unexplored means.

My general plan in this paper is to identify in a new way the grounds of Spinoza's views on number, on one-ness and many-ness, and in so doing to offer new support for reading Spinoza as adopting at least some of the strands of idealism that have been attributed to him.

## I. Conflicting Texts?

I begin not with attributes or modes, where the debate over idealism and multiplicity has been most intense, but with substance, where there has been somewhat less strife. It's clear that, in some sense, for Spinoza God is the only substance. After all, Spinoza says explicitly that "God is unique, that is (by E1d6) [...] there is only one substance" [E1p14c1].<sup>8</sup> Similarly clear statements occur elsewhere both in the *Ethics* [e.g., E1p10s: "in nature there exists nothing but a unique [*unicam*] substance"] and in the *Short Treatise* [e.g., KV, I, ch. ii, §17, note e and KV, II, ch. xxiv, §3].<sup>9</sup> This is Spinoza's famous substance monism and, while there is debate over the characterization of this monism, there is broad agreement that Spinoza is some kind of monist.

However, as Mogens Lærke has helpfully stressed in a recent, excellent paper, Spinoza on at least two occasions evinces hesitation about saying that God is one and that God is the only substance.<sup>10</sup> First, in his *Cogitata Metaphysica* immediately after saying that God is unique and that there cannot be more than

one of the same nature as God, Spinoza seems to take it back: “If we wished to examine the matter more accurately, we could perhaps show that God is only improperly called one and unique.”<sup>11</sup> Spinoza also says in a letter which is as brief as it is significant both for subsequent philosophy of mathematics and for idealism, “it is certain that he who calls God one or unique has no true idea of God, or is speaking of him only very improperly.”<sup>12</sup>

These sentiments in Spinoza have long made me uneasy for it has been unclear to me how to incorporate them into a general understanding of Spinoza’s substance monism. Lærke’s paper makes great strides in this connection and enriches the treatment of number and Spinoza’s monism.<sup>13</sup> I aim in this chapter to go beyond Lærke’s paper in three ways: (1) I will articulate the philosophical underpinnings of Spinoza’s conception of number at work in the passages I have emphasized; (2) I will demonstrate the significance of these passages not only for Spinoza’s conception of the one-ness of substance, but also for his conception of the many-ness of attributes and of modes; (3) finally, throughout the chapter, I will emphasize the connection between the notion of number and one-ness at work in Spinoza and the understanding of Spinoza as an idealist.

## II. Number and Essence

Let’s examine Spinoza’s conception of what it is to number a thing or things—i.e., what it is for us to see them as one or many—before returning to substance (and then going on to discuss attributes and modes). For Spinoza, to number a thing or to number things is to regard the things in question as falling under a certain concept or belonging to a certain kind [*genus*]. This is evident in a famous passage that was sampled and, in a certain respect, praised by Frege:

We do not conceive things under numbers unless they have first been brought under a common genus [*commune genus*]. For example, he who holds in his hand a penny and a dollar will not think of the number two unless he can call the penny and the dollar by one and the same name, either “coin” or “piece of money.” For then he can say that he has two coins or two pieces of money, since he calls not only the penny, but also the dollar, by the name “coin” or “piece of money.” From this it is evident that nothing is called one [*unam*] or unique [*unicam*] unless another thing has been conceived which (as they say) agrees with it. [Ep. 50/C II 406/G IV 239]<sup>14</sup>

Why should it be the case that to count—to number—a thing or things is, as Frege would agree, to see them as falling under a certain concept or belonging to

a certain kind? To see what is driving Spinoza here, consider what would be the case if we saw a certain thing or certain things as one or many—i.e., we numbered them—but did not see them as falling under a certain concept or belonging to a certain kind and, in particular, if we did not number them in part *because* they fell under a certain concept or belonged to a certain kind. Without seeing the object or objects in terms of this feature, it seems that our counting just *this* or *these* objects would be arbitrary. Why are we focusing on just this object or just these objects (and counting them) unless we see them as belonging to a kind or as having a certain property? Our thought of just these objects would then be unexplained. This would offend against Spinoza's rationalism—against his rejection of unexplained or arbitrary, brute facts.<sup>15</sup> The kind or genus is that *in virtue of* which we regard certain objects as available to be counted. At work here is a kind of descriptivism in Spinoza's thought: we do not represent or conceive of certain objects barely or directly; rather we conceive of them through properties in terms of which they can be described or conceived. And in the argument I have just given, we can see in Spinoza a rationalist basis for a descriptivist, anti-direct reference position and for Spinoza's insistence in Ep. 50 that things are counted or numbered because they have a feature or belong to a kind.<sup>16</sup>

However, Spinoza departs from Frege in at least two respects.

First, Spinoza seems to regard the kind to which a numbered thing or numbered things belong as a kind which does, or at least can, include a multiplicity of members. Thus Spinoza says when we count a thing we must conceive "another thing" which "agrees with it." For Spinoza, to see a thing as one—to count it as one—we must in effect, see it as one of many. But why should this be the case? Can't there be kinds or concepts, in terms of which we count, which are such that only one thing could conceivably fall under them? Isn't that what we do when we form, for example, the concept of "the integer immediately succeeding 3" and we reckon that there is only one thing that can conceivably fall under this concept—viz. 4? Why then does Spinoza require that to regard a thing as one is to regard it as one of many?

I don't think that Spinoza ever takes up this question in this form. But I think we can see our way to an answer that Spinoza could give. Notice that when we invoke a concept—such as "the integer immediately succeeding 3"—the concept invoked is complex, containing concepts of a variety of concepts each of which applies to the object—viz. 4—that satisfies the complex concept in question. These constituent concepts—such as "integer" and "successor of 3"—are ones that can apply to more than one thing. In counting our object—viz. 4—as the *one* object that is the integer immediately succeeding 3, we are thus also in a position to

regard that object as falling under a kind or kinds—such as, again, “integer” and “successor of 3”—that apply to more than one thing. So even if there are concepts used in counting—such as “the integer immediately succeeding 3”—that could not conceivably apply to more than one object, such a concept involves attributing to the object other properties that are such that more than one object could have those other properties. Thus, in the end, when we count an object—even in terms of a necessarily unique property—we are also committed to counting the object in terms of a property or properties that can apply to more than one thing.

Spinoza does not argue in this way in order to justify this first departure from Frege, but this justification is open to him. His point then, put more precisely, would be that to count a thing, one must invoke a property that other things can share with that thing or a property that is composed of at least some properties of the thing that it shares or can share with other things.

The second departure from Frege in Spinoza’s conception of what it is to assign a number to a thing concerns the essence or nature of the thing. For Spinoza, not only must we see the numbered items as sharing a certain property or as belonging to a certain class, it must also be the case that that property is the essence or nature of those things. In other words, for Spinoza, to assign a number to a thing is to see it as belonging to a class of things whose members share the same essence. This is clear in both of the central texts in which Spinoza says that God is not properly called “one.” Thus in Ep. 50 Spinoza says:

A thing can be called one or single only in respect of its existence, not of its essence. For we do not conceive things under the category of numbers unless they are included in a common class. [Ep. 50/C II 406/G IV 239]

Spinoza goes on to say that since nothing else can share God’s essence or nature, God cannot be numbered. The implication is that a thing that can be numbered shares its essence with other things. Here Spinoza seems to indicate that to number a thing is to put it in a class of things with the same essence or nature.

Spinoza makes a similar point in CM I, ch. vi. There he points out that God is called one but only improperly so because “there cannot be more than one of the same nature.”<sup>17</sup> Again, for a thing to be assigned a number, it must be seen as sharing its nature with other things.<sup>18</sup>

I am claiming that, for Spinoza, when one numbers a thing, the class (or a class) to which one sees the thing as belonging is a class of things that share the same nature as the thing. And when he says that a numbered thing must “agree” with other things, he means that it must agree in nature with other things. If the class in terms of which things are numbered could be a class of

things that do not share the same nature, then it is no longer clear why God could not be numbered—after all, God can be seen as falling into the same class as some other things. For example, God and my body have the property of being extended. This property is *not* the nature of either me or God. My body's nature is to have a certain proportion of motion and rest [E2le4–E2le5]. God's nature is to consist “of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence” [E1d6]. If the classes that interest Spinoza in Ep. 50 are not classes of things of the same nature, then it is no longer clear why God cannot be numbered. Thus, for Spinoza, the common class under which a numbered thing falls must be a class of things of the same nature.<sup>19</sup>

Why, however, would Spinoza place such a strong requirement on what it is to consider a thing numerically? I think that Spinoza's view that to think of a thing in terms of number requires conceiving of it as sharing an essence follows from the fact that, for Spinoza, to conceive of a thing one must conceive of it in terms of its essence. This is what I have elsewhere called Spinoza's essence requirement on representation.

Before seeing the strong reasons Spinoza has for espousing the essence requirement (and thus for espousing the additional, strong requirement that numbered things must share the same essence), let's examine the textual reasons for attributing this view to Spinoza.

The central piece of textual evidence for attributing the essence requirement to Spinoza is E2d2—Spinoza's definition of that which pertains to the essence of a thing. Spinoza says:

I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing. [E2d2]

Spinoza claims here (in part) that a thing cannot be conceived without its essence or, equivalently—given the way Spinoza understands the notion of “conceived without” in terms of conceptual involvement<sup>20</sup>—Spinoza is saying in E2d2 that the concept of a thing involves the concept of its essence.

A similar linkage between the representation or conception of a thing and the representation or conception of its essence is evident from Spinoza's equation of the idea of a thing and its objective essence in TIE §36 and TIE §41 and KV-A2, §7.

Further, Spinoza's identification of the idea of a thing and its definition in Ep. 60 (“*idea, sive definitio*”) also suggests that representation proceeds via a grasp of

essence. Spinoza accepts the traditional view that the definition of a thing states its essence.<sup>21</sup> Thus in identifying idea and definition in Ep. 60, Spinoza indicates that the representation of a thing is a representation of its essence.<sup>22</sup>

Why does Spinoza accept the essence requirement on representation? After all, it is a rather implausible requirement, so it would seem that a very good reason would be needed to accept it. As I have argued elsewhere, this very good reason—in Spinoza's eyes—for the essence requirement consists of two claims to which he is deeply committed: the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the explanatory or conceptual separation between the attributes. The latter is the claim that each of the attributes is conceived through itself [E1p10s]. I want to call attention here to an important implication of Spinoza's conceptual barrier between the attributes: Spinoza infers from this separation that nothing mental can be explained by anything extended and vice versa [E2p6 and E3p2].

With this point in mind, consider what would be the case if I represented or conceived of an extended thing,  $x$ , not in terms of its essence (or of a feature that follows simply from the essence of  $x$ ), but instead conceived of it in terms of a feature,  $F$ , that is not due to the essence of  $x$  alone, but is instead in part due to some other thing,  $y$ .

To see what would, for Spinoza, be wrong with a scenario, ask the following question: Given that the idea is about the thing that has  $F$ , why is that idea about  $x$  in particular? Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason dictates that there must be an answer to this question. The answer, it seems, is that this is because  $x$  is the thing with  $F$ . Fine, but this fact—that  $x$  is the thing with  $F$ —depends, as we stipulated, on some object other than  $x$ , namely,  $y$ . Because  $x$  is extended and because—given the explanatory barrier between the attributes—extended things interact only with other extended things,  $y$  too must be extended. In light of the fact that the idea of the thing with  $F$  is about  $x$  because  $x$  is the thing with  $F$ , and in light of the fact that  $x$  is the thing with  $F$  because of some other object,  $y$ , it follows that the idea is of  $x$  because of some other object,  $y$ . And now we reach something that would trouble Spinoza: a certain mental fact—that an idea represents a certain object—is explained by a certain fact concerning not thought, but extension, namely, the fact that  $y$  exists. But this explanation of something mental in terms of something extended would violate the explanatory barrier. A similar problem would arise, I believe, for each purported case of representation of a thing in terms of its non-essential features.

By contrast, the same problem does not arise for representation of a thing in terms of its essence. The parallel question here would be: Given that the idea is of the thing with essence  $E$ , why is it of  $x$ ? Answer: because  $x$  is the thing with  $E$ . And here we reach a natural stopping point to our questioning, for the next



question would be: Why does  $x$  have essence  $E$ ? (In the same way, we asked in the previous case: Why is  $x$  the thing with  $F$ ?) In contrast to the previous case, this question answers itself:  $x$  has essence  $E$  simply because that is what it is to be  $x$ . So, for Spinoza, given that the idea is of the thing with  $E$ , the reason that the idea represents  $x$  in particular does not invoke any dependence on an extended object and thus does not violate the explanatory barrier between thought and extension. For Spinoza, in the case of representation of a thing in terms of its essence, which object is represented is determined simply by the nature of the thought itself and by the features grasped in the thought. No help from any extended object, such as  $y$ , is required, and so the explanatory barrier is preserved.

Evidence that Spinoza holds the general view that the explanatory barrier precludes factors other than thought from determining the object of representation can be found in E2p5 and E2p5d:

Ideas, both of God's attributes and of singular things, admit not the objects themselves, or the things perceived, as their efficient cause, but God himself insofar as he is a thinking thing. [E2p5]

This is evident from E2p3. For there we inferred that God can form the idea of his essence, and of all the things that follow necessarily from it, solely from the fact that God is a thinking thing, and not from the fact that he is the object of his own ideas. [E2p5d]

Spinoza here seems to say that the fact that there is an idea of a particular object is to be explained completely in mental terms and not in terms of any other attribute. This consideration would rule out representation of things that does not proceed via a grasp of their essence.<sup>23</sup>

The essence requirement on representation helps us to understand why Spinoza holds that to regard a thing numerically is to regard it as a member of a class all of whose members share the same essence. Since to represent a thing in terms of number is to see it as belonging to a certain class whose members share a certain property, and since to represent a thing is to represent it as having a certain essence, to represent a thing in terms of number is to represent it as belonging to a certain class all of whose members share that essence. If the class in terms of which we enumerate a thing were a class of things that did not share the essence of the thing in question then we would, in enumerating the thing, be seeing it in terms of a feature other than its essence. And thus we would be violating Spinoza's essence requirement on representation.

One might think that perhaps we can first secure reference to a thing by thinking of it in terms of its essence—just as the essence requirement specifies—and then

go on to enumerate that thing by focusing on some further property that does not constitute its essence but that it shares with other things. In this way the shared property need not be the essence of the thing that is enumerated.<sup>24</sup> This two-step strategy would not, however, avoid the problem at hand, for to the extent that one is focusing on the non-essential property then—given the essence requirement—one is no longer genuinely representing the object. In moving to a focus on the shared property, one loses one's focus on the essence of the object, and one's thought that is employed in the attempted enumeration is thus no longer really a thought of the object in question. Again, the essence requirement is violated.

In this light, we can see how Spinoza's theory of number, according to which to regard some thing numerically is to regard the thing as one of many of the same nature, is grounded in Spinoza's views on what is required to represent a thing, which, in turn, are grounded in his fundamental commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the explanatory separation of the attributes.

### III. Number and Substance

Exactly how we are to understand this separation between the attributes is a matter that will be illuminated once we apply our understanding of Spinoza's views on counting to his views on substance and attribute. To see God numerically—to see God as one of many—is, given Spinoza's account of number, to see God as one of many that share the same nature. But, for Spinoza, nothing but God can have the nature that God has. God's nature, as we have seen, is to be a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes. No other thing can have that nature, of course. Thus, God cannot be seen in terms of number. God cannot be one, for God cannot be one of many of the same nature.

How, then, are we to make sense of Spinoza's claim that God is one and that there is only one substance, namely, God? It may help here to distinguish between a strict or proper sense of "one" and a loose or improper sense of "one." That Spinoza would recognize some such distinction is apparent from his speaking of "improperly" calling God "one" which suggests that a proper/improper distinction is available in this context.

To say that a thing is one presupposes that it exists.<sup>25</sup> Further, the reason that God is not properly called one is that, despite the fact that God exists, there are not many of the same nature as God. This suggests that:

[**one-p**]  $x$  is one in the proper sense (or one-p) just in case  $x$  exists and there are others of the same nature as  $x$ .

This characterization of “one” and the similar characterizations to follow are not definitions. Defining “one” in terms of there being or not being *others* of a certain nature is problematic because, it could be argued, the notion of an other presupposes the notion of one. So the above claim would be illegitimately circular if it were intended as a definition. But as a mere characterization of a kind of oneness it can, perhaps, be illuminating, even if ultimately circular.

In light of this characterization, we can say that, for Spinoza, God is not one-p.<sup>26</sup> However, in the lead-up to Spinoza’s claim in E1p14c1 that God is one, Spinoza establishes that there are no other substances—or other things—of the same nature as God.<sup>27</sup> This foundation for his claim of one-ness in E1p14c1—a claim that he elsewhere labels “improper”—indicates that the improper sense of “one” can be characterized this way:

[**one-i**]  $x$  is one in the improper sense (or one-i) just in case  $x$  exists and it is not the case that there are other things of the same nature as  $x$ .<sup>28</sup>

Notice that the proper and improper senses of “one” are differentiated by the fact that the final conjunct in one characterization is the negation of the final conjunct in the other characterization. That is, the characterizations differ in that the conjunct in one characterization concerning whether or not things are of the same nature is negated in the other characterization. This kind of difference between proper and improper senses will be repeated in other contexts, as we will soon see.

Before we turn to other similar notions with proper and improper senses in Spinoza, I want to point out that, just as God is one-i and not one-p, so too the extended substance is one-i and not one-p. The extended substance is not one-p because, although the extended substance exists, there are no others of the same nature as the extended substance. The nature of the extended substance is simply the attribute of extension. E1p5—the no-shared attribute thesis—implies that there is no other substance whose nature is extension. Thus the extended substance is not one-p. But the extended substance is one-i for it exists and, as we have just seen, there are no others of the same nature. Similarly, the thinking substance is one-i, but not one-p.

If the essence or nature of the extended substance is extension and if the essence of God is—as we saw—to consist of an infinity of attributes, how then are God and the extended substance related: Are they the same or not? And how are their essences related: are they the same or not? It is to this kind of question that I now turn.

Spinoza often speaks of things as being “one and the same” [*una eademque*].<sup>29</sup> Thus, for example, Spinoza says in E2p7s that the thinking

substance and the extended substance are one and the same, and that a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same. Given the presence of the term “one” and given the proper/improper distinction that we have just outlined with regard to “one,” we’d expect a similar ambiguity in the case of “one and the same,” i.e., we’d expect that there would be in Spinoza a commitment to proper and improper senses of “one and the same.” Similarly, given the ambiguity of “one and the same” and given that “many” can be seen as the opposite of “one and the same”—as Spinoza says in CM I, ch. vi: “unity and multiplicity are opposites”—we’d expect there to be proper and improper senses of “many” as well as of “one and the same.” Further, given their opposition, we would expect “one and the same” and “many” to be characterizable in terms of each other.

In this light, how are we to characterize the claim that  $x$  and  $y$  are one and the same? Let’s focus first on the proper sense of this term. In order for  $x$  and  $y$  to be one-and-the-same-p, i.e., one and the same in the proper sense,  $x$  and  $y$  must both exist. (In the same way, the first conjunct of the claim that  $x$  is one is, as we saw, the claim that  $x$  exists.) So, “ $x$  and  $y$  exist” should be the first conjunct in the characterization of “one-and-the-same-p.”

Second, since, as I noted, “one and the same” is the opposite of “many,” we can say that if  $x$  and  $y$  are one and the same in the proper sense, then they are not many in the proper sense. Exactly what it is for things to be many in the proper sense we will turn to in a moment.

To complete the characterization of “one and the same” in the proper sense, note that “one and the same” can be seen as a numerical notion and that, as we saw, to see things in terms of number is, for Spinoza, to see them as sharing a nature with other things. One way to see  $x$  and  $y$  in the numerical terms indicated by “one and the same” is thus to see  $x$  and  $y$  as of the same nature.<sup>30</sup>

In this light, here is a characterization of being one and the same in the proper sense:

[**one and the same-p**]  $x$  and  $y$  are one-and-the-same-p just in case  $x$  and  $y$  exist,  $x$  and  $y$  are not many-p, and  $x$  and  $y$  are of the same nature.

In the same vein, we can characterize what it is to be many in the proper sense. Recall that “one and the same” and “many” are opposites, and so it is natural for them to be characterizable in terms of each other. With these features in mind, we can say the following:

[**many-p**]  $x$  and  $y$  are many-p just in case  $x$  and  $y$  exist,  $x$  and  $y$  are not one-and-the-same-p, and  $x$  and  $y$  are of the same nature.

To arrive at the improper senses of “one and the same” and of “many,” recall that the improper sense of “one” differed from the proper sense of “one” only insofar as the conjunct concerning whether there are things of the same nature is affirmed in the characterization of one sense and denied in the other. In this light, the characterizations of the improper senses of “one and the same” and of “many” would be the following:

**[one-and-the-same-i]**  $x$  and  $y$  are one-and-the-same-i just in case  $x$  and  $y$  exist,  $x$  and  $y$  are not many-p, and it is not the case that  $x$  and  $y$  are of the same nature.

**[many-i]**  $x$  and  $y$  are many-i just in case  $x$  and  $y$  exist,  $x$  and  $y$  are not one-and-the-same-p, and it is not the case that  $x$  and  $y$  are of the same nature.

With these distinctions between proper and improper senses of “one and the same” and of “many” in hand, let’s consider the relation between the thinking substance, the extended substance, and God. Consider the thinking substance and the extended substance first. They are not one-and-the-same-p because the thinking substance and the extended substance differ in nature. The nature of the thinking substance is thought and the nature of the extended substance is extension, and no substances share attributes. Notice also that the thinking substance and the extended substance are not many-p. This is for the same reason that they are not one-and-the-same-p, namely, they are not of the same nature. But in light of the fact that the thinking substance and the extended substance are neither one-and-the-same-p nor many-p, we can reach the conclusion that the thinking substance and the extended substance are one-and-the-same-i. Notice that all the relevant conjuncts are satisfied in this case: the thinking substance and the extended substance exist, they are not many in the proper sense, and it is not the case that they are of the same nature. Thus when Spinoza says in E2p7s that “the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance,” what he says can be seen as true if “one and the same” is understood in the improper sense.

But notice that while the thinking substance and the extended substance are one-and-the-same-i, they are *also* many-i, for consider: the thinking substance and the extended substance exist, they are not one-and-the-same-p, and it is not the case that they are of the same nature.

In this light, we can see that God and the thinking substance are one-and-the-same-i (but not one-and-the-same-p) and that they are many-i (but not many-p). Similarly for the relation between God and the extended substance.

Thus Spinoza’s strictures concerning “one” and number, and his distinction between proper and improper senses of “one” put his substance monism in an

entirely new light. Just as God may be called “one” only improperly, so too the thinking substance and the extended substance may be called “one and the same” only improperly. And while the thinking substance and the extended substance are properly speaking not many, they may be called many-i, just as they may be called one-and-the-same-i.

#### IV. Number and Attributes

How much of this apparatus and how much of this ambiguity in Spinoza concerning “one and the same” applies to Spinoza’s notion of attribute? It might seem that whatever nuances and complications that we get into when considering whether substance is one, it is nonetheless obvious that the attributes are many, that they are distinct, and that they are in no sense one and the same. After all, isn’t it clear that God has an infinity of attributes [E1d6] which are, as Spinoza is at pains to state [E1p10s, etc.], independent of one another? Thus attributes, Spinoza says, may be conceived to be really distinct [E1p10s]. And since, as Spinoza makes clear in E2p7s, the intellect that is so conceiving them is the infinite intellect, and since all ideas insofar as they are in the infinite intellect are true [E2p32], it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the attributes are really distinct and are many and are not one and the same.

It is for such reasons such that many commentators have over the years seen fit to reject Wolfson’s interpretation according to which:

The two attributes appear to the mind as being distinct from each other. In reality, however, they are one [...]. The two attributes must [...] be one and identical with substance.<sup>31</sup>

For Wolfson, any distinction among attributes is an illusion of the finite intellect: “attributes are only *in intellectu*” and “to be perceived by the mind means to be *invented* by the mind.”<sup>32</sup> Since the distinction between attributes is illusory, for Wolfson, and thus mind-dependent, his reading falls within an idealist tradition.

In the same vein, Hegel says:

Spinoza does not demonstrate how these two [attributes] are evolved from the one substance [...]. Neither are extension and thought anything to him in themselves, or in truth, but only externally; for their difference is a mere matter of the understanding, which is ranked by Spinoza only among affections.<sup>33</sup>

But although there may seem to be strong textual reasons against the view that there is no multiplicity of attributes for Spinoza, matters begin to look much

different when we see the issue of the multiplicity—the many-ness—of attributes in light of Spinoza’s general views about one-ness and many-ness. Indeed, given that Spinoza explicitly indicates that one-ness (and thus many-ness) are to be understood in different senses, we have no choice but to rethink Spinoza’s apparent views on the many-ness of attributes in light of these different senses.

Before we apply my Spinozistic characterizations of “one” and “many” to the attributes, note that, for Spinoza, the nature of an attribute is just that attribute itself. The nature of extension is just extension, and the nature of thought is just thought. That attributes have natures is explicit in E1p21 where Spinoza speaks of the “absolute nature” of an attribute, and it is apparent from the discussion of thought in E1p21d that thought’s nature is just thought. That any attribute’s nature is just that attribute itself makes sense if we consider that, for Spinoza, attributes are self-conceived [E1p10] and in themselves [E1p29s].

So let’s turn to the question of one-ness—“Is extension one?”—keeping in mind our characterizations of the proper and improper senses of “one” which I provide again here for convenience:

**[one-p]**  $x$  is one-p just in case  $x$  exists and there are others of the same nature as  $x$ .

**[one-i]**  $x$  is one-i just in case  $x$  exists and it is not the case that there are other things of the same nature as  $x$ .

It is clear that extension is not one-p because there are no other things of the same nature. Nothing else but extension has the nature extension. If another attribute also has the nature extension, then that “other” attribute would simply be extension.

But just as the fact that there are no others of the same nature as extension shows that it is not one-p, the same fact shows that extension is one-i. Similarly, thought is one-i, but not one-p, just as, as we saw, God is one-i, but not one-p.

Let’s ask the crucial question: Are thought and extension one and the same or are they many? Again, we must approach this question in light of the distinction between proper and improper senses of these terms. Here again are the relevant characterizations:

**[one-and-the-same-p]**  $x$  and  $y$  are one-and-the-same-p just in case  $x$  and  $y$  exist,  $x$  and  $y$  are not many-p, and  $x$  and  $y$  are of the same nature.

**[one-and-the-same-i]**  $x$  and  $y$  are one-and-the-same-i just in case  $x$  and  $y$  exist,  $x$  and  $y$  are not many-p, and it is not the case that  $x$  and  $y$  are of the same nature.

**[many-p]**  $x$  and  $y$  are many-p just in case  $x$  and  $y$  exist,  $x$  and  $y$  are not one-and-the-same-p, and  $x$  and  $y$  are of the same nature.

[**many-i**]  $x$  and  $y$  are many-i just in case  $x$  and  $y$  exist,  $x$  and  $y$  are not one-and-the-same-p, and it is not the case that  $x$  and  $y$  are of the same nature.

It is clear that thought and extension are neither one-and-the-same-p nor many-p (just as neither is one-p). And this is because thought and extension do not share natures (just as substances do not share attributes). The fact that the attributes are neither one-and-the-same-p nor many-p demonstrates that, fundamentally, numerical concepts do not apply to attributes any more than they do to substances.

However, precisely because thought and extension are not of the same nature (and because they are not many-p), thought and extension are one-and-the-same-i. For similar reasons, as we saw, the thinking substance and the extended substance are one-and-the-same-i.

And precisely because thought and extension are not of the same nature (and because they are not one-and-the-same-p), thought and extension are many-i.

Similarly, we can see that God and thought, say, are not one-and-the-same-p or many-p (for they are of different natures). But God and thought are one-and-the-same-i and many-i. Similar points apply to the “pair” of God and extension. In general, in Spinoza’s view, for the same reason that God is not properly called “one,” the attributes are not properly called “many.” Just as Spinoza is speaking improperly—as he acknowledges—when he says in E1p14c1 that God is the only substance, so too he is speaking improperly when he says that there are different attributes. In general, number-presupposing notions such as many-ness, distinction, and being one and the same do not apply to attributes any more than these notions apply to substance.

## V. The Partial Rehabilitation of Wolfson

In this light, let’s return to the interpretations of Wolfson and of some idealist readers of Spinoza. Such interpreters have come under fire for saying that the attributes are the same, but we can now see that such attacks are importantly unfair, for in a certain respect Wolfson is right.<sup>34</sup> Thought and extension are the one and the same at least in the improper sense of that term. Further, properly speaking there is no multiplicity as far as attributes are concerned, just as Wolfson says. Wolfson was also attacked for saying that the attributes are the same as God or substance. But here too he was right: extension and God *are* one and the same—i.e., in the improper sense.



What Wolfson should have added is that the attributes, in addition to being one-and-the-same-i, are also many-i and are also not one-and-the-same-p and not many-p. Still, Wolfson is right in an important respect because the attributes are indeed one and the same, i.e., they are one-and-the-same-i.

However, there is an even deeper respect in which—despite the partial vindication I have offered—his conclusions are wrong. Wolfson says that the distinction of the attributes is “*invented by the mind*”<sup>35</sup> and thus illusory. This is one of the main reasons for saying that such an interpretation is idealist: distinction among attributes is somehow dependent on mind or thought.

But, by means of the framework I have offered, we can see that in saying that attributes are distinct, we need not be guilty of any confused or inadequate thought. Yes, to say that thought and extension are many-p would be to think inadequately simply because it is not true that thought and extension are many-p. Notice, however, that thought and extension are not many-p simply because thought and extension are not of the same nature. So, there is no reason to regard the thought that thought and extension are not many-p as inadequate. Equally, there is no reason to regard the thought that thought and extension are many-i as inadequate. After all, to have this thought is just to think that thought and extension exist and are not one-and-the-same-p, and that it is not the case that thought and extension are of the same nature. Each of these conjuncts is true, as we have just seen.

The thought that thought and extension are many-p would be inadequate, but one who affirms that thought and extension are many or different need not be asserting the (false) claim that thought and extension are many-p. Rather, such a proponent of the many-ness of attributes may have in mind simply the correct thought that they are many-i, i.e., that thought and extension exist, they are not one-and-the-same-p, and it is not the case that they are of the same nature. There is nothing that need be inadequate in this thought that the attributes are many-i.

Thus the attributes are the same (in the improper sense) and to this extent Wolfson is right. Nonetheless, he fails to acknowledge that it is equally true that the attributes are many in a sense, i.e., improperly speaking. And, perhaps even more significantly, he fails to see that in saying that the attributes are many in this sense, we are not taking part in any illusions. To the extent that the idealist reading, as far as the attributes are concerned, is based on the supposition that claiming that the attributes are many must be an illusion, such a reading is not well-grounded.

Of course, it may still be the case that for other, more general reasons apart from an alleged illusion, any distinction between the attributes may be seen as

dependent on thought and thus as fitting into an overall idealist system. As I have argued elsewhere and as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the Principle of Sufficient Reason itself provides such a general reason for seeing idealism at work in Spinoza's philosophy when it comes to the issue of the many-ness of the attributes.<sup>36</sup> My point here, though, is that the idealism with regard to the many-ness of the attributes is not, contrary to what Wolfson and others claim, a function of any illusions.

## VI. Number and Modes

Things get even more complicated, however, when we turn from attributes to modes and investigate whether and in what sense Spinoza may be an idealist when it comes to modes. It may be that seeing modes as many is dependent on illusion or inadequate thinking in a way that seeing attributes as many is not.

To see how this is so, we need to crank up our machinery of the one and the many once again and apply it to modes. And in order to do this, it is necessary to make a controversial—but, as I will argue, textually well-grounded—observation about Spinoza's notion of essence. The observation is that not only is the essence of God unique, as well as the essence of the thinking substance and the essence of the extended substance, and similarly for the attributes of extension and of thought, but it is also the case that the essence of each thing—including modes—is unique to that thing.

To see that such a notion of essence is at work in Spinoza, return to his definition of that which pertains to the essence of a thing:

I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing. [E2d2]

I want to focus on that part of this definition where Spinoza claims that if the essence (or that which pertains to the essence) of a thing,  $x$ , is given, then  $x$  is also given. If a thing other than  $x$  were to have the essence as well, then it would seem that this essence could be posited without  $x$  being posited—for, as long as  $y$  which is distinct from  $x$  is present, the essence in question could, it seems, be posited without  $x$  being posited. But since Spinoza is saying in this definition that the essence cannot be posited without the thing being posited, it must be the case that no thing distinct from  $x$  also has this essence. The point here is general,

and so we reach the conclusion that, for Spinoza, essences are unique: each thing has a unique essence.<sup>37</sup>

This reading of E2d2 is confirmed by the way Spinoza invokes E2d2 in E2p37, which states:

What is common to all things [...] and is equally in the part and in the whole does not constitute the essence of any singular thing. [E2p37]

The proof runs as follows:

If you deny this, conceive (if possible) that it does constitute the essence of some singular thing, say the essence of B. Then (by E2d2) it can neither be nor be conceived without B. But this is contrary to the hypothesis. Therefore, it does not pertain to the essence of B, nor does it constitute the essence of any other singular thing. [E2p37d]

Spinoza's point here is that if a feature is common to each thing, then it cannot constitute the essence of any particular thing, say B. This is because if this feature is common to all things—to B and other things—then this feature can be (and can be conceived) without B in particular. But this conclusion—Spinoza indicates here—would go against E2d2's claim that that which pertains to the essence of thing can neither be nor be conceived without the thing. Thus no common property can constitute the essence of any particular thing.

The reasoning Spinoza employs here would also establish the stronger conclusion that no feature common not to all things but to more than one thing can constitute the essence of any given thing. Let's say that there is a feature common to *x*, *y*, and *z*. This feature cannot constitute the essence of *x* because, given that this feature is common to more than one thing, the feature can be and can be conceived without *x* in particular. And, again, this result would be incompatible with the claim that this feature constitutes the essence of *x*. The conclusion is, again, general, and we reach the broad claim that no feature that is shared by more than one thing can constitute the essence of any particular thing. Thus—just as we concluded from E2d2 itself—essences must be unique.<sup>38</sup>

Spinoza sometimes says that individual things—such as men—share the same nature. For example, in E1p17s, Spinoza says, that men “can agree entirely according to their essence” [G II 63]. I think that this shared nature is not the individual nature of any particular thing or man, but is, rather, a feature shared by some, but not all, things. The definition of “man” Spinoza speaks of in E1p17s and E1p8s2 and elsewhere does not, I think, capture the essence of an individual man, but instead, perhaps, captures what it is to be a certain kind of thing and not the essence of any particular thing.<sup>39</sup>

What, then, is the essence of particular modes? As I mentioned, Spinoza tells us in the case of any composite finite mode of extension that its essence is to have a certain proportion of motion and rest [E2le4–5]. More generally, the essence of a complex mode whether extended or not is to have a tendency to preserve a certain relation among the individuals that make up the complex mode [E3p7].<sup>40</sup>

The fact that no two modes share the same essence has surprising consequences for the number and individuation of modes.

First, consider a mode of thought—mt1—and a mode of extension—meA—that is parallel to that mode of thought. That is, consider the mode of extension that plays the same causal role in the series of modes of extension that the mode of thought plays in the realm of thought. Spinoza says explicitly that these modes are one and the same. In light of our Spinozistic machinery of one and many, we can see that they are one and the same only in the improper sense and not in the proper sense. This is because, given that mt1 and meA are not of the same nature, they are neither many-p nor one-and-the-same-p. And in light of the fact that they are neither many-p nor one-and-the-same-p, it follows that meA and mt1 are many-i and, as I've said, one-and-the-same-i. Thus, we can see that when Spinoza says that mt1 and meA are one and the same, what he says can be seen as true if “one and the same” is understood in the improper sense.

Next consider two modes of extension: meA and meB. These modes occupy different locations in the series of modes of extension, and they play different causal roles within extension. Spinoza thus regards these modes as different or as many and not one and the same. This claim is correct but it must be placed in the context provided by our machinery concerning one and many. Thus we can see that since meA and meB (despite both being extended) are of different natures, they are neither one and the same nor many in the proper sense. However, given that they are neither one and the same nor many in the proper sense, they are both one and the same in the improper sense and many in the improper sense. Thus when Spinoza indicates that modes of extension are different or many, what he says can be seen as true if “many” is understood in the improper sense. Similar conclusions apply to any “two” modes of thought or any “pair” of a mode of thought and a mode of extension.

It might seem to be an unfortunate implication of this reading that in the sense in which my mind and my body are one and the same (viz., in the improper sense I have isolated), my mind and *your* body are also one and the same. After all, my mind and your body do not share the same nature, and that is enough to show that they are one-and-the-same-i. But don't we want my mind and my body to be one and the same for Spinoza in a sense in which my mind and your

body are not? Yes, perhaps we do, and perhaps an additional sense of “one and the same” different from those I have focused on in this chapter can also be seen as at work in Spinoza. To articulate such an additional sense, I would turn first to the notion of sharing attribute-neutral features, features that do not presuppose one attribute or the other. Arguably—and, indeed, I have made precisely this argument in my work on mind-body identity in Spinoza<sup>41</sup>—my mind and my body share all attribute-neutral features, while my mind and your body do not. Such a sense of “one and the same” focused on shared attribute-neutral features is well worth developing, but it is important to note two points. First, this sense would still not be a proper sense of “one and the same” because it trades on an improper notion of number. Second, this sense can co-exist peacefully with the improper sense of “one and the same”—i.e., “one-and-the-same-i”—that I have identified as at work in Spinoza.

In general, number-presupposing notions such as many-ness, distinction, and being one and the same do not apply to modes any more than these notions apply to substances or to attributes. If we say that modes are distinct or many, we are speaking improperly, for Spinoza, in precisely the same way that for him when we speak of God as one we are speaking improperly. Further, as I have contended, when we speak of attributes as many, we are speaking improperly. Strictly, there is, for Spinoza, on my reading, no differentiation or many-ness in the world. I would only add that strictly there is no one-ness in the world either. Strictly, number-presupposing notions do not apply to reality.<sup>42</sup>

We can see, however, that in one important respect—relevant to the question of idealism—the case of modes differs from the case of substance and attributes. We saw earlier that in saying that the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same in the improper sense or that the attributes are many in the improper sense, we are not under any illusion. To take the case of attributes in particular, recall that to say that the attributes are many-i is to say that they exist, they are not one-p, and they are not of the same nature. Each of these conjuncts is straightforwardly true, for Spinoza, because the number-presupposing commitments have been eliminated. So in saying that the attributes are many-i, we are not under any misapprehension or illusion.<sup>43</sup> And, thus, as I said, there is no basis for seeing Spinoza as an idealist with respect to the distinction among the attributes, at least not for the reason that such a distinction would be illusory or a mere product of the mind.

By contrast, there *is* a reason to see Spinoza as regarding the many-ness of the modes—i.e., their many-ness in the improper sense—as involving some kind of illusion or at least incoherence. This incoherence gives rise to a kind of

idealism with regard to modes that is not present with regard to substance or attributes.

To say that modes A and B are many in the improper sense is to say that they exist, they are not one-and-the-same-p, and that it is not the case that they are of the same nature. As in the case of attributes, each of these claims regarding modes may seem to be straightforwardly true. If this is the case, then Spinoza would not be an idealist with regard to modes on the ground that the perception of them as distinct involves some kind of illusion.

However, if we look more closely, we can see an incoherence in the claim of the many-ness of modes. This incoherence stems from an application of Spinoza's notion of essence and his notion of number, the two notions that drive the claim of many-ness here. Thus, consider more carefully the first conjunct in the characterization of the claim that the modes are many-i: modes A and B exist. What exactly is it for a mode to exist? E1d5 tells us: "By mode I understand the affections of substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived."<sup>44</sup> This definition of "mode" indicates that each mode is such that, by its very nature, it depends on—it is in and conceived through—an *other*. This other is ultimately the substance of which the mode is a mode, and, as Spinoza makes clear in the second half of *Ethics* Part 1, modes may also depend by their nature on *other* modes.

I want to focus on this word "other" [*alio*], for it does, after all, presuppose the notion of number. If a mode—mode A—is, by its nature, other than some thing (call this other "God"), then mode A and God are more than one, they are at least two, they are many. But now let's crank up the machinery of number yet again. In order for mode A and God to be seen in this numerical light dictated by the very notion of what it is to be a mode, we must see mode A and God as belonging to a class of things *all of which share the same nature*. But, as I've stressed, for Spinoza no two things share the same nature. So the worry is that, although the very notion of mode involves the notion of other-ness and thus involves both the notion of number and the claim that there are things that share the same nature, no two things can share the same nature for Spinoza. Thus the very notion of mode presupposes something that is inconceivable by Spinoza's lights—viz., the sharing of essences and the applicability of number. And so, any notion of distinction among modes is likewise incoherent. Thus the first conjunct in the characterization of mode A and mode B are many—a claim that presupposes that modes exist—is not coherent.

Of course, while it may be true that nothing can be a mode and that there can be no distinction among modes, perhaps—in keeping with Spinoza's own

distinction between proper and improper ways of speaking—it may nonetheless be the case that speaking improperly we can say that there are modes and there are distinctions among modes. Perhaps, we can say that, although properly speaking, for a mode to exist is for certain things to share an essence—something that cannot be the case—nonetheless, speaking improperly, we can say that mode A exists.

What would this improper way of speaking be? We can say that mode A exists in the improper sense just in case:

mode A exists,  
 God exists,  
 mode A depends on God, and  
 mode A and God are not one-and-the-same-p.

This last conjunct is meant to capture the content that is improperly expressed by saying that the mode is other than the substance.

However, this improper expression of “mode A exists” still relies on the claim that mode A exists. And so we ask: Is the conjunct “mode A exists” to be understood in the proper or improper sense? As we have seen, the strict sense of “mode A exists” is incoherent. So the first conjunct of the expression of “mode A exists” in the improper sense must be “mode A exists in the improper sense.” We thus have not succeeded in giving a characterization of “mode A exists in the improper sense” other than by saying that mode A exists in the improper sense.

There seems to be no way to state the existence of a mode that does not rely on an improper use of terms. The numerical notions cannot be eliminated or replaced by non-numerical notions. Likewise, “modes A and B are many” can be expressed only improperly for the expression of “modes A and B are many in the improper sense” relies upon the claim that mode A exists which can only improperly be expressed.

Does the notion that, for example, the thinking substance exists or the notion that the attributes exist lead to similar difficulties? As far as I can see, it does not. “Mode A exists” is problematic because this claim turns on the notion of other-ness. But the notions of God or thinking substance or extended substance or thought or extension do not turn on the notion of an *other*. Substance is, after all, conceived through itself. It is not conceived through another. Similarly, attributes are self-conceived. So, unlike the notion of modes, the notions of substance and of attributes are free from the taint of other-ness, difference, and number that renders the notion of modes incoherent or only improperly expressible.

This interpretation of the content of the claim that mode A exists—viz., “mode A exists, God exists, mode A depends on God, and mode A and God are not one-and-the-same-p”—may shed light on Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge. It turns out that the only positive aspect of the content of the idea that mode A exists—an aspect that is not hidden behind a negation or that is not an aspect that involves improper expressions—is that expressed by “God exists.” To the extent that a conception of a mode has genuine, positive content, it is just the idea that God exists. This suggests that the adequate idea of a mode is really just an adequate idea of God and that adequate ideas of different modes are really just the idea of God and not different ideas after all. The development of this account of the third kind of knowledge in Spinoza is a topic I leave for another occasion.<sup>45</sup>

Because any thought of a distinction among modes is likewise only improperly expressible, well might Hegel and his allies think that the notion of Spinozistic modes and of their distinction involves some kind of illusion. And well might Spinoza be seen as committed to acosmism, just as Hegel charged.<sup>46</sup> In this light, any distinction among modes is not a feature of reality, but is somehow mind-dependent or an illusion. This would be a kind of idealism when it comes to modes. And, as I noted, this kind of idealism in Spinoza would be additional to the general kind of idealism that stems from the mind-dependence of all things that is embedded in the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

I am aware, of course, that this interpretation, one broadly sympathetic to a Hegelian idealist interpretation and one broadly in keeping with an Eleatic reading of Spinoza, may seem to be in tension with a number of texts in which Spinoza seems committed to a multiplicity of attributes or modes, for example, Spinoza’s apparent commitment to multiplicity in his talk of the order and connection of things—a notion that is central to his so-called parallelism [E2p7]. In this connection, we must also point out that Spinoza’s talk of intuitive knowledge of finite things [e.g., in E5p22 and E5p31] straightforwardly seems to commit him to genuine multiplicity.<sup>47</sup>

I do not have the space here to address the relevant passages, so I will limit myself to two general comments. First, in this chapter I have tried to isolate an aspect of Spinoza’s thinking about one, many, and differentiation. This may or may not be an aspect that he always has uppermost in his mind, but it is a line of thought that does real work in Spinoza’s system and is expressive of a genuine metaphysical commitment of his. If we downplay or dismiss this way of thinking about number in Spinoza, then we are failing to appreciate something real in Spinoza’s thought.



Second, I think that many or, perhaps, even all of the passages that may seem to conflict with my reading can be handled by invoking some variation of the proper/improper distinction that Spinoza invokes and that I have relied on throughout this chapter. Thus the differentiation presupposed by order and connection and by the apparently distinct instances of the third kind of knowledge may turn on the notion of many-i, i.e., on many-ness spoken of improperly.

So, for Spinoza, not only is it the case that whatever is is dependent on thought, but it is also the case that substance and attributes are coherently thinkable in a way that modes—with all their other-ness—are not. And this differential status of modes, on the one hand, and substance and attributes, on the other, is due to the difference whereby the notions of substance and of attribute, unlike that of modes, are free of the problematic notion of something different, of an other. It is this difference with regard to difference and other-ness that makes all the difference in the world. And, as we can now see, all the difference in the world is really no difference at all.

## Notes

- 1 Many of the ideas in this chapter were forged in the most congenial crucible of my seminar on Spinoza at Yale in the spring semester of 2016. I am grateful to all the members of the seminar for their challenges and engagement. I am also grateful to the lively participants at the 2016 Leibniz-Spinoza workshop at Michigan State University, at a colloquium at the New School in December 2016, at a Jacob Perlow lecture at Skidmore College in March 2017, at an early modern philosophy workshop in Tel Aviv in April 2017, at the Collegium Spinozanum in Groningen in July 2017, at a Yale faculty lunch in December 2017, and of course at the conference in Paris that generated this volume. Thanks also are due to many others including especially Jack Stetter, Charles Ramond, Pierre-François Moreau, Chantal Jaquet, Martin Lin, Yitzhak Melamed, John Grey, Noa Naaman-Zauderer, Alison Peterman, Mogens Lærke, Alex Silverman, Stefanos Regkas, Ohad Nachtomy, and of course Pascal Sévérac whose generous comments at the Colloque International Spinoza France États-Unis were insightful and most welcoming. Alex Silverman's penetrating response to and criticism of this chapter (in his "Monism and Number: A Case Study in the Development of Spinoza's Philosophy," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 34 (2017): 213–230) has already appeared in print: thus my chapter should definitely not be considered the last word.
- 2 On this kind of idealism in Spinoza stemming from the Principle of Sufficient Reason, see Michael Della Rocca, "Rationalism, Idealism, Monism, and Beyond,"

- in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. Eckhart Förster and Yitzhak Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). For the Principle of Sufficient Reason-oriented reading of Spinoza, see my *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge, 2008) and “Interpreting Spinoza: The Real Is the Rational,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 3 (2015): 523–536.
- 3 G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, 3 vols (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995); Harold H. Joachim, *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901).
  - 4 Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).
  - 5 For a classic and powerful rebuttal of Wolfson’s interpretation, see Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza 1: Dieu* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968), appendix 3.
  - 6 See Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), ch. 9.
  - 7 See, for example, Della Rocca, “Rationalism, Idealism, Monism, and Beyond” and Michael Della Rocca, “Rationalism run amok: Representation and the reality of emotions in Spinoza,” in *Interpreting Spinoza*, ed. Charlie Huenemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For an acute discussion of—though not an endorsement of—the acosmist reading, see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, “Acosmism or Weak Individuals? Hegel, Spinoza, and the Reality of the Finite,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 48, no. 1 (2010): 77–92.
  - 8 “*Hinc clarissime sequitur Deum esse unicum hoc est (per definitionem 6) in rerum natura non nisi unam substantiam dari*” [E1p14c1/G II 56].
  - 9 For these and similar passages, see Mogens Lærke, “Spinoza’s Monism? What Monism?” in *Spinoza on Monism*, ed. Philip Goff (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 244 and 259n3.
  - 10 Ibid.
  - 11 “*Si rem accuratius examinere vellemus, possemus forte ostendere Deum non nisi improprie unum, et unicum vocari*” [CM I, ch. iv/G I 246].
  - 12 “*Certum est, eum, qui Deum unum, vel unicum nuncupat, nullam de Deo veram habere ideam, vel improprie de eo loqui*” [Ep. 50/G IV 240].
  - 13 See also: Pierre Macherey, “Spinoza est-il moniste?” in *Spinoza: Puissance et ontologie*, ed. Myriam Revault d’Allonnes and Hadi Rizk (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1987); Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1988); and Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, appendix 17.
  - 14 Frege quotes part of this passage in *Foundations of Arithmetic*, §49 (see *The Frege Reader*, ed. Michael Beaney (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 101). For a discussion of Frege’s engagement with Spinoza on this point, see Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, appendix 17.
  - 15 For Spinoza’s rejection of brute facts, see, for example, E1p11d2: “For each thing there must be assigned a cause, or reason, both for its existence and for its

- nonexistence.” Elsewhere, I’ve argued that for Spinoza the rejection of brute *things* is equally, in the context of Spinoza’s system, a rejection of brute *facts*. See Della Rocca, “Interpreting Spinoza,” 525–526.
- 16 It would be interesting to explore whether there is a similarly rationalist basis both for Frege’s descriptivism and for his Spinozistic view on counting as made possible by a grasp of a concept under which counted items fall.
  - 17 “*Ejusdem naturae plures esse non posse*” [CM I, ch. vi/G I 246].
  - 18 See also E1p8s2 [G II 51] and Ep. 34 [G IV 179–180]. In both of these texts, the numbered things are said to share the same nature.
  - 19 Lærke sees Spinoza in this light as well: “Being *one* is inconceivable without the conception of several of the same nature and, *a fortiori*, inconceivable without the conceivability of several of the same nature” (Lærke, “Spinoza’s Monism?,” 255).
  - 20 See E2p49d: “To say that A must involve the concept of B is the same as to say that A cannot be conceived without B.”
  - 21 See E3p4d, TIE §95, and Della Rocca, *Representation*, 88.
  - 22 See Della Rocca, *Representation*, 86.
  - 23 This paragraph and the previous two paragraphs are adapted from Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 96–98. A different way of employing the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the explanatory barrier between the attributes in order to reach the conclusion that representation of a thing proceeds via representation of its essence can be constructed if we appeal to the equivalence of existence and intelligibility in Spinoza. See Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 264–265 and Michael Della Rocca, “Spinoza and the Metaphysics of Scepticism,” *Mind* 116, no. 464 (2007): 851–874.
  - 24 For this objection, I am indebted to John Grey.
  - 25 Cf. Spinoza’s claim in CM I, ch. vi that “unity is not in any way distinct from the thing itself.”
  - 26 See also Ohad Nachtomy, “A Tale of Two Thinkers, One Meeting, and Three Degrees of Infinity: Leibniz and Spinoza (1675–8),” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19 (2011): 935–961, esp. 947: “The infinity of the divine substance cannot be quantified or measured but rather belongs to a different category all together.”
  - 27 See, in particular, E1p5.
  - 28 Lærke offers a similar characterization of the sense of “one” in E1p14c1 as “not several, i.e. [...] there is *not another one*” (“Spinoza’s Monism,” 257). Cf. Macherey: “Dieu [...] est unique, en ce sens qu’il n’est pas plusieurs” (“Spinoza est-il Moniste?”). My characterization differs from these in emphasizing, as Lærke himself does elsewhere (as I noted above), that there is not another one *of the same nature*.
  - 29 My understanding of this phrase has been challenged and deepened by Alex Silverman’s important work. See Alex Silverman, *The Union of Thought and Being in Spinoza*. PhD dissertation. Yale University, 2014.

- 30 We might also want to specify that there are other things, besides  $x$  and  $y$ , of the same nature, but I will drop this further claim since it will not have any impact on the differentiation of proper and improper senses of the terms in question.
- 31 Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 156.
- 32 Ibid., 146.
- 33 Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, vol. 3, 268–269. For a discussion of this aspect of Hegel's interpretation, see Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, 464.
- 34 For a different critique of objectivist, non-Wolfsonian readings of attributes in Spinoza, see Noa Shein, "The false dichotomy between objective and subjective interpretations of Spinoza's theory of attributes," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 17, no. 3 (2009): 505–532.
- 35 Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, 146.
- 36 See Della Rocca, "Rationalism, Idealism, Monism, and Beyond," 22–26.
- 37 For similar readings of E2d2, see Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), vol. 1, 163 and Olli Koistinen, *On the Metaphysics of Spinoza's Ethics*. Reports from the Department of Theoretical Philosophy. University of Turku, 1991, 13–14. Cf. Pascal Sévérac, *Spinoza* (Paris: Vrin, 2011), 58: "Ce par quoi se définit l'essence d'une chose ne peut être commun à plusieurs choses."
- 38 Other passages that suggest that essences are unique for Spinoza: "If God had created all men like Adam was before the fall, then he would have created only Adam, and not Peter or Paul. But God's true perfection is that he gives all things their essence, from the least to the greatest" [KV, I, ch. vi/G I 43]; "Things must agree with their particular Ideas, whose being must be a perfect essence, and not with universal ones" [KV, I, ch. x/G I 49]. See also KV, II, pref., §5 which contains an early version of E2d2.
- 39 On this kind of point, see Karolina Hübner, "Spinoza on Essences, Universals, and Beings of Reason," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (2015): 58–88.
- 40 See Della Rocca, *Representation*, ch. 2.
- 41 Ibid., ch. 7.
- 42 Cf. Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, 582: "il [l'entendement] n'a pas en lui la notion du nombre, puisque le nombre se fonde sur le discret." Alison Peterman and Eric Schliesser reach similar conclusions in their important papers which deal with number and measure in Spinoza, though their arguments do not proceed via the considerations I have raised here concerning the proper and improper senses of "one," etc. See Alison Peterman, "Spinoza on Extension," *Philosophers' Imprint* 15, no. 14 (2015): 1–23, and Eric Schliesser, "Spinoza and Science: Mathematics, Motion, and Being," in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

- 43 Similarly, as I claimed, in saying that the thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same, we are not under any misapprehension or illusion.
- 44 “*Per modum intelligo substantiae affectiones sive id quod in alio est, per quod etiam concipitur*” [E1d5/G II 45].
- 45 For an excellent treatment of the third kind of knowledge which has helped me in the formulation of this notion that I offer here, see Kristin Primus, “*Scientia Intuitiva* in the *Ethics*,” in *Spinoza’s Ethics: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- 46 In a series of papers and in my book *Spinoza*, I have reached similar conclusions about the non-reality of modes by means of a very different, but equally rationalist, argument centered not, as the current argument is, on number and essence, but on the tight connections between Spinoza’s notion of in-ness (or inherence), conception, and causation. See, for example, Della Rocca, “Rationalism run amok.”
- 47 For these criticisms, see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, “Why Spinoza Is not an Eleatic Monist (Or Why Diversity Exists),” in *Spinoza on Monism*, ed. Philip Goff (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 206–222. Gueroult (in *Spinoza 1*, appendix 3) also challenges Eleatic readings of Spinoza.

# A Response: In What Way It Exists

Pascal Sévérac

Michael Della Rocca's work on Spinoza's thought is radical in the two senses of the term: radical because Della Rocca is concerned with the root, the very foundation of the system, that is to say, with the very nature of being; and radical because Della Rocca adopts an original and strong position with respect to the entirety of the system: namely, that Spinoza would be an idealist.

Della Rocca's general thesis is that, for Spinoza, everything that exists is dependent on thought: everything that exists is "mind-dependent." This thesis has been developed over the course of his many studies. Notably, he has maintained that being, for Spinoza, is entirely submitted to the Principle of Sufficient Reason. With his contribution, Della Rocca is now examining another aspect of this idealism: namely, that we can, according to Della Rocca, only improperly speak of plurality or of "manyness" in Spinoza, as much with respect to attributes as with respect to modes, since attributes, just like modes, are not distinguishable in themselves or by themselves, but only from the point of view of a mind that perceives them. However, Della Rocca specifies just as quickly that it would be as incorrect to affirm that the attributes are one, or identical amongst themselves, as it would be improper to affirm that there are not many modes. In fact, we cannot count God anymore than we can count attributes or modes.

But if Della Rocca finds himself siding with Hegel's and Wolfson's readings of Spinoza, it is because, according to Della Rocca, only one thing in Spinoza's philosophy can be said to exist in the proper sense of the word, namely, God. This signifies not that "a God exists," but only that "God exists." The attributes also exist, but saying that "the attributes exist" or that "an attribute exists" would be already perhaps improper. One should rather simply say "attribute, that exists," like one says "God exists." With respect to the modes, since conceiving

a mode necessarily signifies conceiving of an otherness in respect to which we conceive the mode, and since this otherness implies a manyness that we can only improperly affirm, therefore, we cannot properly affirm that “such or such mode exists.” Such an assertion—“the mode A exists”—is an incoherent assertion, according to Della Rocca. We see that this reading does indeed harken back to the Hegelian interpretation of Spinozist *acomism*: no mode veritably distinguishes itself from the divine being.

Confronted with such bold, radical theses, I would like to formulate for Della Rocca four questions.

First of all, let me underline the originality of Della Rocca's position, especially when considered from a European point of view. This originality is particularly striking inasmuch we tend to maintain the opposite reading, namely, that Spinoza is a materialist. I write “we tend to maintain,” but I should rather give some names: when I say “we,” I'm thinking of Vittorio Morfino in Italy or of Pierre-François Moreau in France. For Moreau, Spinoza should be treated as a materialist not in virtue of the fact that Spinoza reduces thought to extension (or, in the same vein, reduce mind to an emanation of or function of the body), but, rather, in virtue of the fact that Spinoza applies to Thought the same principles of understanding that he applies to Extension, namely, the naturalization of psychic phenomena, the principle of determinist causality, and the research of the laws of thought, all which allows for Thought to be an equally consistent something as Extended matter. In this way, Spinoza the materialist develops a “physics of Thought” (to borrow the handsome formula from François Zourabichvili) in the very same way that he lays the building blocks for a physics of Extension.<sup>1</sup>

My first question for Della Rocca would be therefore the following: rather than qualifying Spinoza as an “idealist,” can we not qualify him as a “materialist,” not only in virtue of the fact that the mind is to be studied just like any other natural phenomenon, but also, I'd add, in virtue of the fact that there is no mind without a body, that is to say, there cannot be mind that is not the idea of a body? Asked differently still, can we not say, with much greater certainty, not so much that things are *mind-dependent*, than that the *mind* is *body-dependent*?

Second, I would like to ask a question concerning the idea of essence in Spinoza. Della Rocca thinks that three criteria are to be found in Spinoza that allow for counting and that allow us to treat a thing as one or to see if in fact there are many things: (a) it is necessary that this thing or these things exist; (b) it is necessary that the thing exists either by itself or in a quantity *x* or *y* or, etc.; and (c) it is necessary that the thing be of the same nature as other things that can also exist. But, as Della Rocca remarks, the definition of essence at the beginning

of *Ethics* Part 2 poses a strict reciprocity between a thing and its essence.<sup>2</sup> For Spinoza, that which belongs to an essence is given if the thing is given; likewise, the thing is given if that which belongs to its essence is given. Therefore, how can we understand that two things can be of the same nature, since any thing's nature is unique to it alone? In other words, does this criterion of the community of essence have any meaning?

To point to the way to some responses to these difficult questions, we may envision two approaches. One option is to maintain that there exist "specific" things, or species, but these things are not singular things. For instance, Spinoza seems willing to speak of the essence of man, or human nature, as a specific essence, though this cannot be a singular essence. Another option is to see how the term "nature" may designate two different things for Spinoza. On the one hand, the "nature" of a thing designates the singular essence of a singular thing. On the other hand, "nature" designates the common essence of some singular things, that is to say the collection of shared properties that certain singular things have in common—in which case, saying that two things are of the same "nature" (and in this case Spinoza is more likely, I think, to speak of the same nature rather than the same essence), or saying that they share a common nature (such as "human nature"), is like saying that two things have common properties, *not* identical essences.

A related question would be the following. Over the course of his demonstration, Della Rocca assimilates the fact that two things agree in nature to the fact that they have the same nature. But isn't there a distinction to make between the two, in the way that, for example, two rational men could agree in nature, insofar as they reason, even if the first individual's nature—or, rather, essence—is not identical to the second individual's essence?

Third, I have a question about the method of analysis of Spinoza's thought. One of Spinozism's great ideas, it seems to me, is to always think in unison identity and difference. For Spinoza, identity and difference are to be thought in a conjunctive way, never in a disjunctive way. Such is the case concerning the *distinction* between the attributes, which Spinoza specifies is *real*, but which is to be thought as substantial *identity*.<sup>3</sup> This is also the case concerning the *identity* of the mind and the body, which Spinoza maintains constitute one and the same thing, though this identity is to be thought as attributive *difference*.<sup>4</sup> Once again, this is also the case concerning the difference between *Natura naturans* and *Natura naturata*, which is conceived through the identity of one and the same Nature.<sup>5</sup> Once more, this is the case concerning the difference between the mind and consciousness, that is to say, between the idea and the idea of the idea, a



difference, which is conceived as the identity of one and the same idea. (There is only one idea, which is either the idea of an object—the idea of a body, the mind as an objective essence—or the object of an idea—the idea of itself, the mind as a formal essence.)<sup>6</sup> I think we could further multiply the examples.

Spinoza himself says as much: in order to form an adequate idea, it is necessary that we perceive a plurality of things at the same time. The contemplation of a simultaneous plurality is in effect the condition for the understanding of “agreements, differences, and oppositions” between things.<sup>7</sup> Thinking together both identity and difference allows for the conceiving of many things simultaneously. I think we can infer from this a consequence that concerns us here, namely, the impropriety of number with respect to God, attributes, and modes, that is to say, the impropriety of the affirmations “God is one,” “the attributes are many,” and “such a mode exists.” Could this impropriety not be transformed into a veritable “property” of God, as soon as unity and plurality are affirmed together? In other words, our affirmations ought to be, rather, “God is one *insofar as* he consists of an infinity of attributes,” “the attributes are of an infinite number *insofar as* they constitute together at the same time the essence of one and the same substance,” or “such or such a mode exists *insofar as* it is in God and is conceived by God.” In this way, Spinoza’s expression “insofar as” [*quatenus*] becomes the very formula of the simultaneous conception of identity and difference.

This question could also be put in the following way: Is the purely *analytic* point of view suited to understanding a reality which is itself *synthetic*, and whose complexity is synthetic? Moreover, is the point of view of a *linguistic* analysis, of an analysis of sentences that necessarily deploy themselves in *succession*, is this approach suited to understanding that which gives itself in *simultaneity*, and which can only be grasped by an adequate idea? Here I think we find ourselves confronted with a difficult problem concerning the relation between thought and language, or mental affirmation and verbal affirmation: the two are assuredly not identical, according to Spinoza, and yet, *at the same time*, the one cannot be apprehended without the other.

My fourth and final question is very brief. Let us suppose that Spinozism is a form of idealism and that any existent reality is, in fact, *mind-dependent*. What consequences should be drawn from this for Spinoza’s ethics or for his political philosophy? If I wanted to play on words, I would say that Della Rocca has taught us “God loves himself without counting” [*Dieu s’aime sans compter*].<sup>8</sup> In turn, we must therefore love God “without counting.” But let me go further still: to affirm that Spinozism is a form of materialism in the way that I specified

earlier makes for very specific ethical and political consequences. These concern both the usage that we can make of Spinoza for an ordinary ethics (with respect to everyday love, friendship, society, etc.), and, more academically, the usage of Spinoza in psychology, in neuroscience, or in the social sciences. Of course, these consequences that come with affirming that Spinozism is a form of materialism need to be spelled out in their details, but they all, it seems to me, are founded on the shared belief that to understand whatever is mental, and when approaching the totality of psychic phenomena, whether individual or collective, we must first take account of the *body*.

If on the other hand Spinozism is a form of idealism, what consequences does this have for the usage of Spinoza's thought, especially insofar as the hard sciences and social sciences are concerned? Likewise, since Spinoza has written an ethics, what does it mean that this ethics is idealist? Is there a practical upshot to this idealism? These are the crucial questions to which I hope Della Rocca will someday respond.

## Notes

- 1 See Pierre-François Moreau, *Spinoza: L'expérience de l'éternité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), and François Zourabichvili, *Spinoza. Une physique de la pensée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002).
- 2 See E2d2: "I say that to the essence of any thing belongs that which, being given, the thing is [NS: also] necessarily posited and which, being taken away, the thing is necessarily [NS: also] taken away; or that without which the thing can neither be nor be conceived, and which can neither be nor be conceived without the thing."
- 3 See E1p10s: "Although two attributes may be conceived to be really distinct (i.e., one may be conceived without the aid of the other), we still can not infer from that that they constitute two beings, or two different substances."
- 4 See E3p2s: "The Mind and the Body are one and the same thing [*una eademque res est*], which is conceived now under the attribute of Thought, now under the attribute of Extension."
- 5 See E1p29s.
- 6 See E2p21s.
- 7 See E2p29s.
- 8 Translator's Note: a popular French saying is that "quand on aime, on ne compte pas." Prosaically, this means that when you are in love, you don't behave greedily: you take your loved one to a nice restaurant, you offer them nice flowers, and, in short, forget about anything quantitative or numerical.



# The Earliest Draft of Spinoza's *Ethics*

Yitzhak Y. Melamed

## Introduction

The two manuscripts of the *Short Treatise* discovered in the mid-nineteenth century contain two appendices.<sup>1</sup> These appendices are even more enigmatic than the *Short Treatise* itself, and the first appendix is the subject of this study. Unfortunately, there are very few studies of this text, and its precise nature seems to be still in question after more than a century and a half of scholarship.<sup>2</sup> It is commonly assumed that the appendices were written after the body of the *Short Treatise*, and I am not going to challenge this assumption.<sup>3</sup> The first appendix is written in a geometric manner, and it contains seven axioms and four propositions. *Strikingly, it does not include any definitions.* This is in sharp contrast with Spinoza's *Ethics* and his 1663 book, *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, which are similarly written in a geometric manner but include *both* definitions and axioms. One could perhaps suspect that the text we currently have is merely a fragment from a more extensive work that included definitions. In my chapter, I will show that this is not the case, and that the first appendix belongs to a genuine work of Spinoza that *never* contained definitions. I would further argue that the first appendix is most probably the earliest draft we currently have of Spinoza's *magnum opus*, the *Ethics*, but we have a long way to go before we reach that conclusion.<sup>4</sup>

Generally, the content of the first appendix [henceforth KV-A1] is close to two other texts: the second chapter of the first part of the *Short Treatise*, entitled "What God Is," and the first eight to ten propositions of *Ethics* Part 1. A major theme of this piece is the problem of individuation. On this issue, as well as a few others, it sheds new light and helps explain some long-standing problems in the argumentation of the *Ethics*. Let me also note that in one of the two manuscripts the first appendix is introduced by the title "On God," which is the title of *Ethics*

Part 1.<sup>5</sup> Although the extant two manuscripts of the *Short Treatise* are in Dutch, the titles of the various sections of KV-A1 are in Latin, i.e., “*Axiomata*” rather than “*Kundigheden*” and “*Propositio*” rather than “*Voorstelling*.”<sup>6</sup> With these introductory characterizations in mind, let us delve into a study of this very brief and intriguing text. I will begin by discussing the seven axioms, in the course of which I will also note a crucial and hitherto unnoticed link between one of the axioms and a key Kabbalistic doctrine. Following an examination of the four propositions and demonstrations in the second part of the chapter, I will turn, in the third part, to showing that KV-A1 is most probably the earliest draft of the *Ethics* that we currently have.

## I. Axioms

The first axiom of the Appendix reads:

Substance is, by its nature, prior to all its modifications. [*De zelfstandigheid staat wegens syn natuur voor alle syne toevallen (modificationes).*] [KV-A1a1]

The axiom is virtually identical to the first *proposition* of *Ethics* Part 1:

A substance is prior in nature to its affections. [*Substantia prior est natura suis affectionibus.*] [E1p1]

It is clear why the same claim appears as an axiom in KV-A1 and as a proposition in the *Ethics*. In the *Ethics*, the demonstration of this proposition [E1p1d] relies immediately on the definitions of substance and mode [E1d3 and E1d5]. KV-A1 has no such definitions; hence, the claim must be accepted as an axiom.<sup>7</sup>

The body of the *Short Treatise* has no parallel to KV-A1a1. Moreover, the very notion of mode [*wijz*] plays hardly any role in the first chapters of *Short Treatise* Part 1, where the book’s basic ontology is introduced. Even the very brief *Short Treatise* sections dealing specifically with *Natura naturata* [KV, I, chs. viii–ix] tell us very little about the nature of modes, and much of what is written there will be explicitly rejected in the *Ethics*.<sup>8</sup>

The second axiom of the Appendix reads:

Things that are different are distinguished either really or modally. [*De dingen welke verscheiden zyn, worden onderscheiden, of dadelyk of toevallig.*] [KV-A1a2]

The closest claim in the *Ethics* is E1p4:

Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of the substances or by a difference in their affections.

[*Duae aut plures res distinctae vel inter se distinguuntur ex diversitate attributorum substantiarum, vel ex diversitate earundem affectionum.*] [E1p4]

The body of the *Short Treatise* does not contain any clear equivalent to KV-A1a2. The closest claim—“That there are not two equal substances” [KV, I, ch. ii, §2]—is much vaguer and very different from KV-A1a2.

On a first reading, one might think that E1p4 is also quite different from KV-A1a2: both texts suggest that two things may be distinguished by their modes, but while E1p4 asserts that two things may also be distinguished by their *attributes*, the second axiom of KV-A1 has instead “real distinction,” which one might think is a distinction between *substances*.<sup>9</sup> However, the third axiom of KV-A1 elaborates on the nature of real distinction in a manner that seems to close the gap between KV-A1 and E1p4 by explicating real distinction in terms of distinction by *attributes*. Thus, the combination of KV-A1a2 and KV-A1a3 amounts, more or less, to E1p4:

Things that are distinguished really either have different attributes, like thought and extension, or are related to different attributes, like understanding and motion, of which the one belongs to thought, the other to extension. [*De dingen welke dadelyk onderscheiden worden, hebben of verscheide eigenschappen, gelyk als denking en uytgebreidheid, of worden toegepast aan verscheide eigenschappen, als verstaaning en beweeging, welkers eene behoort tot de denking, en het ander tot de uytgebreidheid.*] [KV-A1a3]

One question that Axiom 3 invites is in what sense can a thing be “related to an attribute” while not having it. In other words, what is the nature of the relation the understanding has to thought, and motion to extension (if it is not the relation of having either of the latter as an attribute)? As far as I can see, Spinoza is trying here to draw an interesting distinction between how substance relates to its attributes (i.e., it *has* the attributes), and the relation of the modes to the attributes to which they belong (i.e., they are *related*—a rather generic term—to the attributes).<sup>10</sup>

The demonstration of E1p4 relies on three definitions—E1d3, E1d4, and E1d5. Since the Appendix contains no definitions, it is clear that the claims asserted in its second and third axioms had to be presented as axioms rather than propositions.<sup>11</sup>

The fourth axiom of the Appendix reads:

Things that have different attributes, as well as those that belong to different attributes, have nothing in themselves the one from the other. [*De dingen welke verscheide eigenschappen hebben, als mede de dingen welke behooren tot verscheide eigenschappen, en hebben in zig geen dink de eene van de ander.*] [KV-A1a4]

The fourth axiom of the Appendix has a close, but not precise, parallel in the *Ethics*.

Two substances having different attributes have nothing in common with one another. [*Duae substantiae, diversa attributa habentes, nihil inter se commune habent.*] [E1p2]

I take “having nothing in themselves the one from the other” in Axiom 4 of KV-A1 to be the same as “having nothing in common with one another” in E1p2.<sup>12</sup> However, Axiom 4 also contains the provision that “things that *belong to different attributes* ... have nothing in themselves the one from the other,” which is absent from E1p2 (its closest *Ethics* equivalent is E2p6). It is possible that by the time Spinoza wrote the final version of the *Ethics* he thought that the “belonging to different attributes” provision was redundant, since in E1p1 he already proved that substance is prior to its affections.<sup>13</sup>

Let’s turn now to the fifth axiom of the Appendix:

What has nothing in itself from another thing can also not be the cause of the existence of such another thing. [*Dat geene ‘t welk in zig niet heeft iets van een ander dink, en kan ook geen oorzaak zyn van de wezentlykheid van zulk een ander dink.*] [KV-A1a5]

The *Ethics* analogue of KV-A1a5 is E1p3:

If things have nothing in common with one another, one of them cannot be the cause of the other. [*Quae res nihil commune inter se habent, earum una alterius causa esse non potest.*] [E1p3]

Axiom 6 is the only axiom in the Appendix that has no close parallel in the beginning of the *Ethics*.<sup>14</sup> It reads:

What is a cause of itself could not possibly have limited itself. [*Dat geene ‘t welk een oorzaak is van zig zelfs, is onmogelyk dat het zig zelfs zoude hebben bepaald.*]<sup>15</sup> [KV-A1a6]

In the *Ethics*, Spinoza proves that a substance must be a cause of itself [E1p7d] and infinite [E1p8], i.e., that a substance, or a cause of itself, is *unlimited*. Yet KV-A1a6 does not simply state that the cause of itself is *unlimited*, but rather that “it could not possibly have limited itself.” What is the reason for the subjunctive mood of this axiom? Why would anyone think that the cause-of-itself *could* have limited itself?<sup>16</sup>

To answer this question, we need to make a brief historical detour. Pantheism had been openly advocated by mainstream Kabbalists already by the thirteenth

century.<sup>17</sup> In this context, Kabbalists frequently noted that the numerical value of the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, equals the numerical value of the Hebrew word for nature, *teva*. They relied on this equation to claim that God is identical with nature. Unlike many of their Christian contemporaries, the Kabbalists, at least until the eighteenth century, hardly developed any anxieties about pantheism. Yet the new strand of the Kabbalah, which evolved in sixteenth-century Safed, and was primarily associated with the school of Rabbi Yitzhak Luria (1534–1572), developed the doctrine of the *zimzum*, or divine self-limitation. According to this doctrine, before the creation of the world, God's infinite light withdrew his presence to the margins of the universe and created an empty space [*tahiro*] apparently free from divine presence, in which the drama of our world could take place.

Most Kabbalists adopted Lurianic Kabbalah and the doctrine of the *zimzum* within a very short time period. Yet even among Luria's immediate disciples one can discern allegorical interpretations of the contraction process (*zimzum shelo kepshto*), interpretations that amount to reaffirming God's presence in the totality of nature, thereby reasserting pantheism. One of the pivotal figures who advocated the non-literal or allegorical interpretation of the *zimzum* was the major Amsterdam Kabbalist, Avraham Cohen de Herrera (c. 1562–1635). Herrera, a former *converso*, studied the Kabbalah in the Balkans with the noted Kabbalist Rabbi Israel Sarug (c. 1590–1610), who himself claimed to have studied it directly with Yitzhak Luria.<sup>18</sup> Herrera died in 1635 when Spinoza was just three years old, but his influence on the Spanish-Portuguese Jewish community in seventeenth-century Amsterdam was decisive. Most Rabbinic figures in this community counted themselves as his disciples. That Spinoza was well aware of the pantheistic nature of the Kabbalah we can learn from his remarks in a 1675 letter.<sup>19</sup> I suspect, although at this stage I cannot prove, that the sixth axiom of KV-A1 was Spinoza's own contribution to the then ongoing debate on the proper interpretation of the doctrine of the *zimzum*, i.e., Spinoza—just like Herrera—rejected the notion of divine contraction or self-limitation. This suggestion could easily explain why the sixth axiom is directed particularly against *divine* self-limitation. Remarkably, KV-A1a6 has thus far never been addressed in the extensive, three-centuries-old literature on Spinoza and the Kabbalah.<sup>20</sup>

The seventh and final axiom of the Appendix reads:

That by which things are distinguished is by its nature prior to such things. [*Dat geene door 't welke de dingen onderscheiden worden, is wegens syn natuur het eerste (eerder) in zoodanige dingen.*] [KV-A1a7]



Although there is no *precise* parallel to this axiom in the *Ethics*,<sup>21</sup> the following paragraph from E1p5d seems nevertheless to make a very similar claim.

If [two substances were distinguished] by a difference in their affections, *then since a substance is prior in nature to its affections (by E1p1)*,<sup>22</sup> if the affections are put to one side and [the substance] is considered in itself, i.e. (by E1d3 and E1a6), considered truly, one cannot be conceived to be distinguished from another, i.e. (by E1p4), there cannot be many, but only one. [E1p5d]

This passage relies on E1p1 (“a substance is prior in nature to its affections”) in order to argue that substances cannot be individuated by affections that are posterior to the substance, which is also the main point of the seventh axiom of KV-A1. As far as I can see, the body of the *Short Treatise* contains no parallel to KV-A1a7. I turn now to the four propositions that constitute the second half of KV-A1.

## II. The Four Propositions of KV-A1

The first proposition of KV-A1 and its demonstration read:

To no substance which really exists can we relate [*toegepast worden*] the same attribute that is related to another substance, or (what is the same) in Nature there cannot be two substances unless they are distinguished really.<sup>23</sup> [KV-A1p1]

If the two substances are two, they are different. And consequently (by KV-A1a2) are distinguished, either really or modally. Not modally, for then (by KV-A1a7) the modifications by their nature would be prior to the substance (contrary to KV-A1a1). Therefore, really. Hence what can be said of the one cannot (by KV-A1a4) be said of the other. This is what we were trying to prove. [KV-A1p1d]

The *Ethics* equivalent of KV-A1p1 and its demonstration is E1p5d, which we have already encountered. In both texts, Spinoza argues that things cannot be distinguished through their modes, since this would make substances dependent on their modes. However, two important points are unique to the Appendix version of the demonstration. First, KV-A1p1d refers to the attributes as “what is said *of* the substance,” which is a technical Aristotelian-Scholastic term.<sup>24</sup> Second, it refers to a distinction by attributes as a *real* distinction (while E1p5d does not employ that terminology). In KV-A1p1, just as in its *Ethics* parallel, Spinoza is not worried by the possibility Leibniz will later point out, i.e., that two substances can share *some* attributes and thus be distinguished by the attributes they do not share.<sup>25</sup> Finally, this proposition shows that KV-A1, unlike the *Short*

*Treatise* itself, is a resolutely un-Cartesian text, insofar as it does not allow for a plurality of substances sharing the same attribute.

The second proposition of KV-A1 addresses the issue of causal relations between substances:

One substance cannot be the cause of the existence of another substance. [KV-A1p2]

Such a cause can have nothing in itself of such an effect (by KV-A1p1), for the difference between them is real, and consequently (by KV-A1a5) it cannot produce [*voortbrengen*] it [existence [*wezentlykheid*]]. [KV-A1p2d]

The clear *Ethics* parallel of this proposition is E1p6, which relies on the very same justification—causation requires a shared attribute—in order to conclude that there cannot be causation among substances.

One substance cannot be produced by another substance. [*Una substantia non potest produci ab alia substantia.*] [E1p6]

In nature there cannot be two substances of the same attribute (by E1p5), i.e. (by E1p2), which have something in common with each other. Therefore (by E1p3) one cannot be the cause of the other, or cannot be produced by the other [*sive ab alia non potest produci*], q.e.d. [E1p6d]

One thing that we can learn from comparing KV-A1p2d and E1p6d is that, for Spinoza, *production* is just causing the existence of something. Here again, the ban on causal interaction between substances diverts significantly from Descartes's views.

The third proposition addresses the infinity of substance and attribute:

Every attribute, or substance, is by its nature infinite, and supremely perfect in its kind [*oneyndig, en ten oppersten volmaakt in zyn geslacht*]. [KV-A1p3]

No substance is produced by another (KV-A1p2); consequently, if it exists, it is either an attribute of God or it has been a cause of itself [*een oorzaak van zig zelfs*] outside God. If the first, then it is necessarily infinite and supremely perfect in its kind, as are all God's other attributes. If the second, it also must be such; for (by KV-A1a6) it could not have limited itself. [KV-A1p3d]

Let me suggest a few observations regarding this proposition. First, in the demonstration, Spinoza seems to move seamlessly between attribute and substance, treating the two as virtually identical. This attitude is present in other parts of the first appendix, as well as in the first drafts of the *Ethics* quoted in Ep. 2 and Ep. 4.<sup>26</sup> Second, the demonstration is the first time God is mentioned at all in KV-A1. In the absence of a definition of God, each is left to rely on her or his own

understanding of God. Presumably, the vast majority of Spinoza's contemporaries would agree that God is "necessarily infinite and supremely perfect in its kind." Still, in later drafts of the *Ethics*, Spinoza will state these points explicitly in the definition of God.<sup>27</sup> Third, there is no precise *Ethics* parallel to this proposition. Still, E1p8, its demonstration, and its first scholium cover most of the content and reasoning of the third proposition of KV-A1. Fourth, Spinoza's use of Axiom 6 in the demonstration shows that by the "limitation of a cause of itself," he meant an infinite substance turning into a finite substance. Fifth, the demonstration of Proposition Three allows for a plurality of *causa sui* substances (just as the possibility of a plurality of substances is not ruled out in the *Ethics* until E1p14).

The fourth and final proposition of the Appendix is its longest and most substantial unit.

Existence belongs [*behoord*], by nature, to the essence of every substance, so much so [*ook zo zeer*] that it is impossible to posit in an infinite intellect the idea of the essence of a substance which does not exist in Nature. [KV-A1p4]

In E1p7, Spinoza proves that "it pertains [*pertinet/behoort*] to the nature of substance to exist," and the necessity to conceive of substance as existing is argued in E1p8s2 (relying partly on E1d1 and E1a7).<sup>28</sup> However, unlike these *Ethics* passages, the fourth proposition of KV-A1 refers specifically to *God's intellect*.<sup>29</sup> Let us turn now to the demonstration of the fourth proposition.

The true essence of an object [*van een voorwerp*] is something which is really distinct from the Idea of that object, and this something (by KV-A1a2)<sup>30</sup> either exists really, or is contained in<sup>31</sup> [*begrepen in*] another thing which exists really and from which one cannot distinguish this essence really, but only modally [*wyzelyk [modaliter]*]; such are all the essences of things we see which, when they did not previously exist, were contained [*begrepen*] in extension, motion and rest, and which, when they do exist, are distinguished from extension not really, but only modally. And also it involves a self-contradiction to maintain that the essence of a substance is contained in another thing in this way, since in that case it would not be distinguished from it really (contrary to KV-A1p1); also, it could then be produced by the subject which contains [*begrypt*] it (contrary to KV-A1p2); and finally, it could not be infinite through its nature and supremely perfect in its kind (contrary to KV-A1p3). Therefore, because its essence is not contained [*begrepen*] in any other thing, it must be a thing that exists through itself. [KV-A1p4d/G I 116, l. 8–26]

Spinoza begins the demonstration by denying that essences are just ideas, a point he also stresses in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*.<sup>32</sup> He then moves to arguing

that the essence of substance cannot be “contained [*begrepen*]” in another substance (i.e., a thing which is really distinct from the original substance). The key to understanding Spinoza's claims here is the precise meaning of the term “*begrepen*.” Fortunately, Spinoza makes very similar claims in E1p8s2. Let us have a look at this passage. I add in parentheses the corresponding Dutch terms from the *Nagelate Schriften*:

This is how we can have true ideas of modifications which do not exist; for though they do not actually exist outside the intellect, nevertheless their essences are comprehended in another in such a way that they can be conceived through it [*hun wezentheit in een ander in dier yoegen begrepen, dat zy door 't zelfde bevat kunnen worden*]. But the truth of substances is not outside the intellect unless it is in them themselves, because they are conceived through themselves. [E1p8s2/G II 50, l. 8–12]

For Spinoza, we can have true ideas of non-actualized modes because we can adequately “comprehend” their essences through their substance.<sup>33</sup> The relation *x* is comprehended through *y* must be closely related to the relation *x* is conceived through *y*, as Spinoza infers the second relation from the first in the third line of the last passage. Both in the above excerpt from E1p8s2 and in the demonstration of the fourth proposition of KV-A1, Spinoza argues that the essence of substance (unlike the essence of modes) cannot be “contained” or “comprehended” in another, and thus it must be contained in the substance itself. In the demonstration of the fourth proposition of KV-A1, Spinoza also relies on the second proposition of KV-A1 in order to infer that the *existence* of substance cannot be imported from outside it. Thus, both the essence of substance and its existence must be conceived through itself. In sum, the demonstration of the fourth proposition seems to rely on considerations very similar to E1p7d and E1p8s2.

I turn now to the corollary, the last textual unit of the fourth proposition (and of KV-A1 as a whole).

Nature is known through itself, and not through any other thing. It consists of infinite attributes, each of which is infinite and perfect in its kind. Existence belongs to its essence, so that outside it there is no essence or being [*zyn*]. Hence it agrees exactly with the essence of God, who alone is magnificent [*heerlyke*]<sup>34</sup> and blessed. [KV-A1p4c/G I 116, l. 27–32]

The conclusions of the corollary are virtually the same as in E1p11 (“God, or a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists”) and E1p15 (“whatever is, is in God, and

nothing can be or be conceived without God”). Still, the trajectory leading to these conclusions is quite unique. Most of the assertions in this corollary are not derived (or derivable) from earlier axioms or propositions in KV-A1. For this reason, and because it is the last textual unit of KV-A1, I assume the corollary is a very rough draft which Spinoza never polished. Were it to have been polished, Spinoza would have had to introduce new axioms. That being said, we should not miss the corollary’s skeletal yet fascinating argument for the identity of God and Nature, which relies on a variant of the Identity of Indiscernibles. (1) God has infinitely many (and all<sup>35</sup>) attributes each of which is perfect in its kind (Premise). (2) Nature has infinitely many (and all) attributes each of which is perfect and infinite in its kind (Premise). Therefore, (3) God and Nature are indiscernible (from 1 and 2). Hence, (4) God and Nature must be identical (from 3 and the Identity of Indiscernibles). Perhaps at this point Spinoza realized that his axiomatic-system-sans-definitions makes his desired demonstrations highly cumbersome. Indeed, in the final version of the *Ethics*, Premise 1 of the above argument is stated as part of the definition of God [E1d6]. Finally, the corollary comes very close to asserting the identity of God and Nature (“[Nature] agrees exactly with the essence of God”), but it stops just one tiny step short of explicitly inferring this conclusion.

### III. The Nature of KV-A1

In an editorial gloss to his translation of KV-A1, Edwin Curley notes: “This appendix is not designated as such in the manuscript and is generally believed to be posterior to the main body of the *Treatise*.”<sup>36</sup> Along the same lines, KV-A1 (as well as KV-A2) contains no explicit reference to any part of the *Short Treatise*. This is in contrast to the manner in which the *Cogitata Metaphysica* makes frequent reference to *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy*. Another crucial point we can establish by now is that the KV-A1 never contained a section of definitions. All the proofs of the four propositions are designed as relying merely on the seven axioms and the previous propositions.<sup>37</sup> It is a genuine manner of trying to present the core of Spinoza’s metaphysics (at the time) in an axiomatic method, without relying on definitions.

In this part of the chapter, I will argue that KV-A1 is most likely the earliest draft of the *Ethics* that we currently have. I will first present a series of considerations aiming to show that KV-A1 is a *draft* of the *Ethics*, and then turn to arguing that it is *the earliest* draft. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the content of KV-A1 is somewhat similar to two other bodies of

texts in Spinoza's oeuvre: (1) The first eight propositions of *Ethics* Part 1 and (2) Chapters 1, 2, 8, and 9 of *Short Treatise* Part 1, which deal respectively with: God's existence, the nature of God, *Natura naturans*, and *Natura naturata* (other parts of the *Short Treatise* have much less in common with KV-A1). My chief claim would be that it is much more reasonable to consider KV-A1 as a draft of the beginning of the *Ethics* than as a reorganization of the aforementioned four chapters of KV Part 1. Already, while we were scrutinizing the axioms and propositions of KV-A1 in the earlier parts of this chapter, I frequently pointed out parallels between KV-A1 and the beginning of the *Ethics* (and, usually, the absence of such parallels with the body of the KV), but I will repeat some of these points in order to provide a more comprehensive picture.

Here then are the reasons to consider KV-A1 as a draft of the beginning of the *Ethics*:

- (1) The most salient feature of KV-A1 is the use of the axiomatic method. The axiomatic method will become one of the most celebrated, daring, and scorned features of the *Ethics*. No part of the body of the *Short Treatise* exhibits such pattern of presentation. Piet Steenbakkers insightfully pointed out that unlike the other texts of Spinoza that were written in a geometrical manner—*Descartes' Principles of Philosophy*, the *Ethics*, and the excerpts from drafts of the *Ethics* mentioned in Spinoza's correspondence—KV-A1 is the only such text lacking explicit reference to the *mos* or *ordo geometricus*.<sup>38</sup> As far as I can see, there is a simple explanation for the absence of such an explicit reference. KV-A1 is an experiment, an experiment that turned out mostly successful, and led Spinoza to develop and finesse the method of exposition that his great predecessor, Descartes, claimed to be unfit for the study of "metaphysical subjects."<sup>39</sup> During this first experiment with the new method of exposition, the new method had quite likely not yet been given a title, as it was not yet clear that it was a genuinely new *mos*.
- (2) When we compare the content of KV-A1 with the first eight propositions of the *Ethics*, on the one hand, and with the aforementioned four chapters of the *Short Treatise*, on the other hand, it would be fair to say that, generally, the overlap with the *Ethics* is *far more significant* than the overlap with the body of the *Short Treatise*. I will immediately elaborate on specific topics and issues.
- (3) A major theme in KV-A1 is the question of *individuation*, i.e., by virtue of what things are distinct. The very same issue is also paramount at the beginning of the *Ethics*. The topic is almost completely absent from the *Short Treatise*.<sup>40</sup>

- (4) Unlike the KV-A1 and the *Ethics*, the *Short Treatise* makes hardly any attempt to conceptualize the nature of modes or affections. This is true not only of the first two chapters of *Short Treatise* Part 1, dealing with God, but also with the chapters discussing *Natura naturata* [KV, I, chs. viii–ix]. Thus, the claim that substance is prior to its modes—central both in KV-A1 and the *Ethics*—is absent from the *Short Treatise*.
- (5) In the first dialogue following the second chapter of *Short Treatise* Part 1, Reason [*Reden*] scolds its Cartesian opponent, Lust [*Begeerlijkheid*], for following the senses and affirming the existence of many distinct substances. Then Reason adds:

And if you want to call the corporeal and the intellectual substances in respect to the modes which depend on them, *you must equally call them modes too*, in relation to the substance on which they depend. *For you do not conceive them as existing through themselves*. In the same way that you call willing, sensing, understanding, loving, etc., different modes of what you call a thinking substance (all of which you lead back to one, making one of them all), so I also infer, by your own proof, *that infinite extension and thought, together with other infinite attributes (or as you would say, substances) are nothing but modes of that unique, eternal, infinite Being, existing through itself*.<sup>41</sup> [KV, I, ch. ii/G I 29, l. 24–29]

There are two crucial (and related) points which set this passage apart from the metaphysics of the *Ethics*. (i) The passage suggests that the thinking and extended substances also are modes “of the unique and eternal Being.” The *Ethics* would categorically rule this out by the very definition of substance as not being dependent on anything else [E1d3]. (ii) According to the above passage, “the corporeal and the intellectual substances” are *not* conceived as “existing through themselves.” Compare this with E1p7 (“it pertains to the nature of substance to exist”), and the claims that each of the attributes “expresses existence” [E1p20d], and that “each of the attributes must involve eternity,” i.e., [per E1d8] existence. On both of these issues, KV-A1 sides unequivocally with the *Ethics*, against the claims of Reason in the dialogue; KV-A1p2 makes it clear that one substance cannot depend on another substance for its existence, while KV-A1p4 makes it clear that existence belongs to the nature of *every* substance.

- (6) The causal self-sufficiency of substance is a major theme in both KV-A1 and the first eight propositions of *Ethics* Part 1. The *Ethics* proof of God’s existence in E1p11 relies crucially on this key claim. In contrast, KV, I, ch. i presents a series of intriguing proofs for the existence of God. *The causal self-sufficiency of substance plays no role in any of these detailed proofs*. The

proofs of KV, I, ch. i are mostly elaborations on Descartes's proofs of the existence of God. Here again, KV-A1 embarks on a path strikingly different from that of the *Short Treatise*.

- (7) Several scholars have convincingly pointed out the clear Cartesian nature of many of Spinoza's claims in the *Short Treatise*, especially when compared with the *Ethics*'s systematic rejection of many, probably most, of Descartes's major claims.<sup>42</sup> This can hardly be said about KV-A1. Each of the four propositions of KV-A1 is *resolutely* anti-Cartesian.<sup>43</sup>

The considerations I have presented so far purport to establish that KV-A1 is a *draft* of the *Ethics*. The reason to think that it is *the earliest draft* that we currently have is quite simple. Ep. 2 (September 1661), Ep. 4 (October 1661), and the lost enclosure to Ep. 2 (which has been carefully reconstructed by Giuseppa Saccaro del Buffa Battisti and Hubertus G. Hubbeling)<sup>44</sup> contain significant excerpts from early drafts of the *Ethics*, presented in the axiomatic method, and include *definitions*, as well as axioms. All later drafts of the *Ethics*, cited in Spinoza's correspondence, contain a definitions section.<sup>45</sup> Thus, in deciding on the dating of KV-A1, we have two alternative narratives. According to one, KV-A1 is *posterior* to Eps. 2 and 4, and thus it would appear that Spinoza began with an axiomatic method which contained both definitions and axioms. Then, for unknown reasons, he switched to a model without definitions (KV-A1), and then eventually returned to a model which included definitions.

According to the second alternative, KV-A1 *precedes* Eps. 2 and 4. In this narrative, Spinoza experimented with an axiomatic model without definitions (KV-A1), realized its significant shortcomings (e.g., that it required seven axioms to prove just four propositions) and cumbersomeness,<sup>46</sup> and switched from that time onward to a model that included both definitions and axioms. This second narrative seems to me far more probable not only because it provides the simpler explanation (with only *one* significant change in the structure of the axiomatic system), but also because Spinoza's correspondence from around 1661 provides no motivation for either one of the changes that the first narrative assumes. Thus, I conclude that it is highly probable that KV-A1 is the earliest draft of the *Ethics* we currently have.<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

A new philosophical method does not appear complete and polished *ex nihilo*. Clearly, Spinoza's model in developing his axiomatic method was Euclid's *Elements*, but in philosophy there are very few precedents for the use of



axiomatization.<sup>48</sup> In his Synopsis to the *Meditations*, Descartes boasted that “the only order which [he] could follow was that normally employed by geometers, namely to set out all the premises on which a desired proposition depends, before drawing any conclusions about it.”<sup>49</sup> Having read carefully the *Meditations*, and failing to see how this description could fit that text, Mersenne asked Descartes to fulfill his promise and “set out the entire argument in geometrical fashion, starting from a number of definitions, postulates and axioms.”<sup>50</sup> I will leave it to the reader to have her own impression from Descartes’s response to Mersenne at the end of the Second Set of Replies, although, for my part, I strongly suspect that Descartes’s disparaging and hardly convincing claims about the unfitness of the axiomatic method to the study of philosophy made a strong impression on Spinoza, and perhaps even made him think that, voilà, he just found a method.

Not only did Spinoza’s axiomatic method hardly have any anticipators, it had very few followers as well. Schelling’s 1801 *Darstellung meines System der Philosophie* was written *more geometrico*, but it is barely a pale shadow of the *Ethics* in terms of the rigor of its proofs.<sup>51</sup> The rest of the German Idealists seemed to adopt Descartes’s claim that the axiomatic method is not adequate for philosophy. Thus, Hegel argues against Spinoza that philosophy, unlike mathematics, cannot begin with given, presupposed definitions and axioms.<sup>52</sup> The question of how a philosophical system should begin is indeed a deep and serious question, but, as far as I can tell, it is completely orthogonal to the use of the axiomatic method. The axiomatic method renders the argumentative structure of the system bare naked (or so it claims to). As such, it *makes transparent* many methodological problems, such as the question: where should philosophy begin? Yet it neither creates, nor even contributes to the creation of, the problem, and the question of how to avoid arbitrary beginnings in philosophy must haunt Hegel’s non-axiomatic exposition of his philosophy just as much as it does Spinoza.

Transparency should always be considered a virtue, not a vice. With the advent of modern mathematics in the late nineteenth century, the use of axiomatization in various branches of mathematics became widespread. Since the rigor of mathematics was the main source of inspiration for the analytic philosophers of the twentieth century, one might have expected some philosophers to attempt a systematic axiomatization of some branches of philosophy, rather than rely on disassociated amalgams of intuitions (or a vaguely formulated “reflective equilibrium between intuitions and principles”), but thus far, this hasn’t happened. Systematic axiomatization of philosophy is not an easy task.

In the current chapter, I have argued that KV-A1 was Spinoza’s first attempt to present his philosophy *more geometrico*, and that most probably it is the earliest

draft of the *Ethics* that we currently have. I have much admiration for Spinoza's attempt to develop his philosophy in a systematic and axiomatic manner. Needless to say, there are quite a few gaps in the demonstrations of the *Ethics* (as there are quite a few gaps in Euclid's *Elements*). The exposure and evaluation of the threat of these gaps to the conceptual edifice of the *Ethics* are a significant part of the day (and sometimes night) job of a Spinoza scholar.<sup>53</sup>

My study of the first appendix of the *Short Treatise* leaves a number of important and intriguing questions unanswered. What brought Spinoza to experiment with an axiomatic system free of definitions? And why did he avoid definitions in KV-A1, while his early *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* pays very close attention to the issue of the adequacy of definitions?<sup>54</sup> I leave both questions for another occasion, or for other scholars. As one of the early Talmudists—Rabbi Tarfon—tells us: “You are not obliged to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it.”<sup>55</sup>

## Notes

- 1 On the discovery of the *Short Treatise*, see Curley's editorial preface in C I 46–53. For an illuminating and updated discussion of the genesis of this work, see Filippo Mignini, “Introduction au *Court Traité*,” in Spinoza, *Œuvres I: Premiers écrits*, ed. Filippo Mignini (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), 159–180. I would like to thank Justin Bledin, Martjin Buijs, Zach Gartenberg, Mogens Lærke, Don Garrett, and Jack Stetter for their extremely helpful comments on earlier versions of this chapter. I have presented drafts of this chapter at conferences at the ENS Lyon in November 2011 and at Paris 8 in June 2016. I would like to thank the participants and audiences at both conferences for their comments. Finally, I would like to thank Dan Garber, Michael Della Rocca, and Steven Nadler for helpful conversations about my argument in this paper.
- 2 *Studia Spinozana 4: Spinoza's Early Writings*, ed. Filippo Mignini, Pierre-François Moreau, and Guido Van Suchtelen (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1988), and *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), contain some valuable studies of the *Short Treatise*, though none that concentrate on the first appendix. Among the very few studies of the first appendix, one should note Stanislaus Von Dunin-Borkowski, “Der erste Anhang zu De Spinozas *Kurzer Abhandlung*,” *Chronicon Spinozanum* 1 (1921): 63–80, and Christoph Sigwart, *Spinoza's neuentdeckter Tractat von Gott, dem Menschen und der Glückseligkeit* (Gotha: Rudolf Besser, 1866), 145–158.

- 3 See Curley's editorial remark in C I 150 n. 1, and Abraham Wolf, *Spinoza's Short Treatise on God, Man, & His Well-Being*, reprint edn. (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), cxxii.
- 4 An earlier scholar who gestured in the direction of my chief claim in the current article is Wolf, who wrote in his *Spinoza's Short Treatise*, cxxii: "[The First Appendix] is intimately related to the *Ethics*."
- 5 The title "DE DEO" appears also at the beginning of Part 1 of the recently discovered Vatican manuscript of Spinoza's *Ethics* (see *The Vatican Manuscript of Spinoza's Ethica*, ed. Leen Spruit and Pina Totaro (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 83), although, noticeably, the title of the complete book—"Ethica"—is absent from the Vatican manuscript.
- 6 In contrast, in the body of the KV the chapter titles, like the rest of the text, are in Dutch.
- 7 In the *Nagelate Schriften*, the 1677 Dutch translation of the *Opera Posthuma*, E1p1 reads: "*De zelfstandigheid is eerder in natuur, dan haar aandoeningen*." "*Aandoeningen*" is the Dutch translation of "*affectiones*" (as opposed to "*toevallen*" ["accidents"] in KV-A1). On Spinoza's switch from the terminology of accidents to that of modes already in the early drafts of the *Ethics*, see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28–30. See also Mogens Lærke's illuminating discussion of this issue in his response to my chapter in the current volume.
- 8 See, for example, the claim that finite modes ("singular things") are produced by the infinite modes [KV, I, ch. viii/G I 47, l.32], a claim Spinoza rejects in E1p22. Cf. Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 116.
- 9 On real and conceptual distinctions in Spinoza, Descartes, and Suarez, see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "The Building Blocks of Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance, Attributes, and Modes," in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 99–102.
- 10 See: E2p21s, E3p2s, and E4p4d [G II 213, l. 24].
- 11 In principle, E1d3, E1d4, and E1d5 could have been presented as three additional axioms in KV-A1, and then Spinoza could have inferred the content of E1p4 from these axioms. However, Spinoza is not using any definition-like axioms in KV-A1.
- 12 In passing, let me note that in E1p2d Spinoza claims that E1p2 is "evident from E1d3." In fact, E1p2 seems to rely on E1a5 in addition to E1d3.
- 13 E1a5—"Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, *or* the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other"—is making a point related to yet distinct from the fourth and fifth Axioms of the KV-A1.
- 14 E1p8d is the closest *Ethics* equivalent, although it addresses the possibility of one substance being limited "by something *else* of the same nature" (my emphasis).

Another possible equivalent is the *Nagelate Schriften* version of E1p8s1, which reads: "If we assume a finite substance, we would, in part, deny [*ontkennen*] existence to its nature, which (by E1p7) is absurd." E1p7 asserts that "it pertains to the nature of substance to exist." Still, it is not at all trivial that a being to whose nature belongs existence cannot limit itself.

- 15 In the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza tries to prove that an unlimited substance could not have limited itself, "for being unlimited, it would have had to change its whole essence" [KV, I, ch. ii, note b/G I 20, l. 21]. Since in KV-A1 it is not given that the cause-of-itself is unlimited, this line of argument is not available.
- 16 Relying on the *conatus* doctrine, which appears at the beginning of *Ethics* Part 3 (E3p6), Spinoza infers that the essence of each thing cannot limit its existence (E3p8). One could, perhaps, argue that divine self-limitation is inconsistent with the *conatus* doctrine insofar as the former allows for internal self-limitation. Still, it is not clear why Axiom 6 of the Appendix targets specifically *divine* self-limitation, rather than state a general principle—akin to the *Ethics's conatus*—banning any self-limitation.
- 17 See Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Meridian, 1978), 147, and Yoseph Ben-Shlomo, *The Mystical Theology of Moses Cordovero* [in Hebrew, untranslated] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1986), 302–303.
- 18 See Gershom Scholem, "Sarug (Saruk), Israel," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 26 volumes, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd edn (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference, 2007), vol. 18, 63–64.
- 19 "That all things are in God and move in God, I affirm, I say together with Paul ... though in another way—I will also be so bold as to say, with all the ancient Hebrews, as far as can be conjectured from certain traditions [*quibusdam traditionibus*], corrupted as they have been in many ways" [Ep. 73/G IV 307–308, l. 11]. The literal meaning of the Hebrew word "*Kabbalah*" is "tradition," and the view of the Kabbalah as ancient wisdom and a system of symbols whose original meaning got corrupted was widespread in the early modern period.
- 20 For Scholem's overview of Spinoza's relation to the Kabbalah, see his introduction to Abraham Cohen Herrera, *Das Buch [Sha'ar ha-shamayim] oder Pforte des Himmels*, trans. F. Häussermann (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1974).
- 21 It is not at all clear that KV-A1a7 leaves any room for the possibility of distinct substances. Per Axiom 7 of the Appendix, if substances A and B were distinct, they must be distinct by virtue of something that is prior to them, but KV-A1 makes no reference to anything that is prior to substance. I suspect that A7 is just a somewhat imprecise formulation of the claim that things cannot be distinguished by something that is posterior to them. I am indebted to Justin Bledin for drawing my attention to this issue.
- 22 Italics added.

- 23 Here the Monnikhoff manuscript adds: "Or (what is the same) in nature, no two substances of one and the same nature can be posited," a wording which is almost identical to E1p5. See Curley's editorial note in C I 151, note 5.
- 24 See Aristotle, *Categories*, 1a20. Cf. John Carriero, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33 (1995): 246–247.
- 25 See L 198–199; Don Garrett, "Ethics Ip5: Shared Attributes and the Basis of Spinoza's Monism," in *Central Themes in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Jan A. Cover and Mark Kulstad (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1990); and Michael Della Rocca, "Spinoza's Substance Monism," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. Olli Koistinen and John Biro (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17–22.
- 26 See Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "A Glimpse into Spinoza's Metaphysical Laboratory: The Development of Spinoza's Concepts of Substance and Attribute," in *The Young Spinoza*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 272–286.
- 27 See Ep. 2 [G IV 7, l. 25].
- 28 "If someone were to say that he had a clear and distinct, i.e., true, idea of a substance, and nevertheless doubted whether such a substance existed, that would indeed be the same as if he were to say that he had a true idea, and nevertheless doubted whether it was false (as is evident to anyone who is sufficiently attentive). Or if someone maintains that a substance is created, he maintains at the same time that a false idea has become true. Of course nothing more absurd can be conceived. So it must be confessed that the existence of a substance, like its essence, is an eternal truth" [G II 50, l. 13–19].
- 29 Still, since in E2p46 and E2p47 Spinoza argues that even our inadequate ideas involve cognition of God's essence (see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "On the Fish's Knowledge of God's Essence, or Why Spinoza Was Not a Skeptic," in *Studies in Skepticism*, ed. G. Vetri, E. Spinelli, R. Haliva, and S. Schmid (Berlin: DeGruyter, forthcoming)), and since God's essence is existence (as per E1p20, cf. Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Spinoza's Deification of Existence," *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy Volume VI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)), it seems that in the final version of the *Ethics*, Spinoza would rather affirm that even for a *finite* intellect the essence of substance involves existence.
- 30 Curley adheres to the manuscript and has here KV-A1a3. Gebhardt and Mignini emend to KV-A1a2. Since the modal distinction is discussed in a2 but not in a3, I tend to accept their emendation.
- 31 Or alternatively, "understood through."
- 32 Cf. CM I, ch. ii [G I 238, l. 26].
- 33 Spinoza discusses the issues in greater detail in E2p8.
- 34 Perhaps better "lordly," thus affirming in a traditional language that God alone is the Lord.

- 35 "Outside it there is no essence or being" [G I 116, l. 31].
- 36 C I 150, note 1. Cf. von Dunin-Borkowski, "Der erste Anhang," 63.
- 37 Of course, there might be (and indeed there are) *gaps* in the four demonstrations, but nothing in these demonstrations indicates that the text we have ever relied on definitions.
- 38 Piet Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's Ethica from manuscript to print* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1994), 158.
- 39 Descartes, *Second Set of Replies* [CSM II 111/AT VII 156–157].
- 40 With the small exception of the vague claim "that there are not two equal substances" [KV, I, ch. ii/G I 20, l. 4]. Spinoza's justification for this claim [G I 21, ll. 3–6] is also completely different from the crucial requirement—both in KV-A1a7 and E1p5—not to make the individuation of substances dependent on their modes.
- 41 Italics added.
- 42 See, for example, Daniel Garber, "Spinoza's Cartesian Dualism in the *Korte Verhandelng*," in *The Young Spinoza*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 121–132.
- 43 In passing, let me note that the second appendix to the KV seems to cover, more or less, the content of the first half of the *Ethics* Part 2. This appendix, however, is not written *more geometrico*. Perhaps this was an embryonic draft which Spinoza intended to recast in a geometric manner. Regrettably, Spinoza's correspondence does not provide us with much information on the development of this part of the *Ethics*.
- 44 See Giuseppa Saccaro del Buffa Battisti, "La dimostrazione dell'esistenza di Dio dall'abbozzo del 1661 e dalla *Korte Verhandelng* al *De Deo*," in *Dio, l'uomo, la libertà: Studi sul Breve Trattato di Spinoza*, ed. Filippo Mignini (L'Aquila: Japadre, 1990), and Hubertus G. Hubbeling, "The Development of Spinoza's Axiomatic (Geometric) Method," *Revue Internationale de philosophie* 31, no. 119/120 (1977): 53–68. A reconstruction of the lost enclosure is translated by Curley in C I 166, note 6.
- 45 See, for example, Ep. 9 [G IV 45, l. 35 and G IV 46, l. 24].
- 46 Hubbeling ("The Development," 65) wonders why Spinoza used fewer axioms in the enclosure to Ep. 2 than in KV-A1. The answer seems to be straightforward: an axiomatic system which contains definitions is more powerful and can *prove* what would otherwise have to be presented as an axiom. Thus, for example, Axiom 1 of KV-A1 will appear as a proposition in later drafts of the *Ethics*, once the definitions of substance and modes are introduced.
- 47 Both Mignini, in *Spinoza, Korte verhandelng/Breve trattato*, ed. and trans. Filippo Mignini (L'Aquila: Japadre, 1986), 773–786, and Hubbeling, in "The Development," contend that KV-A1 is earlier than Ep. 2 and its enclosure. For a dissenting view, see Buffa Battisti, "La dimostrazione." Cf. Steenbakkers, *Spinoza's Ethica*, 157.

- 48 A notable piece in this respect is Jean-Baptiste Morin's 1635 theological treatise, *Quod Deus sit*. On Morin's booklet, see Daniel Garber, "J.B. Morin and the Second Objections," in *Descartes and His Contemporaries: Meditations, Objections, and Replies*, ed. Roger Ariew and Marjorie Grene (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Cf. Aaron V. Garrett, *Meaning in Spinoza's Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9.
- 49 CSM II 9/AT VII 13.
- 50 CSM II 92/AT IV 128.
- 51 See F. W. J. Schelling, "Presentation of My System of Philosophy" [1801], in J. G. Fichte and F. W. J. Schelling, *The Philosophical Rupture between Fichte and Schelling: Selected Texts and Correspondence (1800–1802)*, ed. and trans. Michael Vater and David W. Wood (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012). For a study of the *Darstellung* essay and its relation to Spinoza's *Ethics*, see Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Deus sive Vernunft: Schelling's Transformation of Spinoza's God," in *Freedom, Nature and Systematicity: Essays on F. W. J. Schelling*, ed. G. Anthony Bruno (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).
- 52 See G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic* [1813, 1816, 1832], ed. and trans. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11.377, and G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, 3 vols (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), III: 263–264.
- 53 Many gaps in the *Ethics* can be easily bridged by making explicit premises that were demonstrated—or affirmed as definitions and axioms—in earlier parts of the book. Other gaps are much more troubling.
- 54 See TIE §§94–97. I am indebted to Dan Garber for raising this second question. For an insightful discussion of the nature of definitions in Spinoza, see John. A. Brandau, *Spinoza on Definition and Essence*. PhD dissertation. Johns Hopkins University, 2016.
- 55 Mishna, Tractate Avot, 2:16.

# A Response: Accidents and Modifications: An Additional Note on Axioms 1 and 2 in Appendix 1 of the *Short Treatise*

Mogens Lærke

Let me begin by thanking Melamed for a chapter that helps us get a substantially better grasp of a text rarely discussed in Spinoza scholarship. In my view, both appendices of the *Short Treatise* afford us essential information about the genesis of Spinoza's system. Melamed has provided a compelling argument for seeing the first appendix of the *Short Treatise* as Spinoza's first "draft" of the *Ethics* and as a crucial text for understanding the passage from the doctrine expounded in the main part of the *Short Treatise* to the *Ethics*. He has also tentatively suggested that one of the central theses presented in this appendix, namely Spinoza's explicit denial of divine self-limitation, is a concern that it is hard to understand without a context—why would anyone think that God would limit himself?—and that the most plausible context is the Lurianic doctrine of *zimzum*, that is, the doctrine according to which God, when creating the world, first vacated a primordial space within himself to make room for creation. Axiom 6 of the first appendix would thus be a rare place in Spinoza where he addressed in an argumentative mode the Kabbalah rather than simply dismissing it as "trifles" and "madness," as in effect he later does in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.<sup>1</sup> I have no objections really to any of these suggestions or very much to add to them. Melamed has provided compelling evidence that the first point is true and that the second is very plausible. So I will leave it at that. I would rather like to focus on the text Melamed has analyzed and return to what could appear to be a detail concerning Axioms 1 and 2 of KV-A1. I want to consider in more depth how they relate to the passages that, as Melamed shows, "mirror" them in the *Ethics*, namely E1p1 and E1p4. I think we can learn something important from



such an analysis about the development of Spinoza's philosophy that concerns his attitude toward the notion of "accidents." I shall also consider some related translation issues.

Let me first recall the first two axioms in the first appendix and their "mirror" texts in the *Ethics*. I give the texts in the original Dutch and Latin and then also provide the two English translations most used these days, by Edwin Curley and Samuel Shirley<sup>2</sup>:

## I.

- KV-A1a1: *De zelfstandigheid staat wegens syn natuur voor alle syne toevallen (modificationes).*
- Curley: Substance is, by its nature, prior to all its modifications.
- Shirley: Substance is, by its nature, prior to all its modifications.<sup>3</sup>
- Elp1: *Substantia prior est natura suis affectionibus.*
- Curley: A substance is prior in nature to its affections.
- Shirley: Substance is by nature prior to its affections.

## II.

- KV-A1a2: *De dingen welke verscheiden zyn, worden onderscheiden, of dadelyk of toevallig.*
- Curley: Things that are different are distinguished either really or modally.
- Shirley: Things which are different are distinguished either *realiter* or *modaliter*.<sup>4</sup>
- Elp4: *Duae aut plures res distinctae vel inter se distinguuntur ex diversitate attributorum substantiarum, vel ex diversitate earundem affectionum.*
- Curley: Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another, either by a difference in the attributes of the substances or by a difference in their affections.
- Shirley: Two or more distinct things are distinguished from one another either by the difference of the attributes of the substances or by the difference of the affections of the substances.

What I am interested in are the Dutch expressions *toevallen* and *toevallig onderscheiden*, how exactly we should translate them, and the extent to which they do in fact "mirror" their corresponding expressions in *Ethics*, that is to say, respectively, *affectiones* and *ex diversitate affectionum*. But I first want to take a look at the English translations, Curley's and Shirley's. They are not substantially

different. If we just read those translations, we easily come to think that if there is any difference to consider between the passages in the *Short Treatise* and their corresponding passages in the *Ethics*, it concerns only the fact that, in the *Short Treatise*, Spinoza speaks about “modifications,” whereas in the *Ethics*, he speaks about “affections.” This terminological shift is real enough and not just a translation issue. For, as Melamed points out in a footnote, if we are to give credence to Pierre Balling’s translation of the *Ethics* in the *Nagelate Schriften*, the appropriate Dutch rendering of the Latin *affectio* is not *toeval* but *aandoening*. So far so good, and there may very well be something worthwhile to say about that change in terminology. That is however not what I want to focus on here. For there is another, I think interesting, variation we can witness between Appendix 1 and the *Ethics*, but that both English translations fail to capture.

Hence, if we go to the original Dutch, we realize that the matter may be a little more complicated. In Axiom 1, Spinoza’s text actually provides two terms, namely the Dutch *toevallen* and the Latin *modificationes* in parenthesis. Both Curley and Shirley here seem to think that the Latin term is simply the translation of the Dutch and renders them both in English by a single term, namely “modifications.” Accordingly, they also render the cognate Dutch term *toevallig* as “modally.” The question is, however, whether it is appropriate to translate the two terms given in Axiom 1 by only one. The question is: Do the Dutch terms *toevallen* and *toevallig* simply *translate* the Latin terms *modificationes* and *modaliter*, or was Spinoza, when providing both terms in Axiom 1, indicating some equivalence of two *different* notions rather than simply providing a translation of a term into another language? Was it just the Dutch translator of the *Short Treatise* who found it a good idea to put the Latin term he translated by *toevallen* in parenthesis? Or was he in fact translating an original Latin text that included two different terms?

Such questions may appear to represent the *summum* of nitpicking. My interrogation is, however, prompted by the fact that “modal” and “modally” are not very natural translations of the Dutch *toeval* and *toevallig*. What one would expect would rather be “accident” and “accidental.” If we look for other occurrences in the *Short Treatise*, we will see that “accident” or “accidental” is indeed the choice for translation that imposes itself elsewhere. There are three of those:

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| KV, I, ch. iii, §4: | <i>God is een oorzaak door zig zelfs, en niet door een toeval.</i> |
| Curley:             | God is cause through himself, and not an accidental cause.         |
| Shirley:            | God is a cause through himself, and not by accident.               |

KV, II, ch. v, §6:	<i>Want deze dewyl ze buyten syne magt zyn, en veel toevallen onderworpen, zoo is 't onmogelyk dat als die komen te lyden, hy daar van zoude kunnen bevryd zyn.</i>
Curley:	For because they are outside his power and subject to many accidents, it is impossible that, when they are acted on, he would be able to be freed of them.
Shirley:	For, since these are beyond his power, and subject to many accidents, it is impossible that, when they are affected, he should be free from these affects.
KV, II, ch. xiv, §4:	<i>(dewyl het voorwerp zoo veel toevallen ja de vernietinge zelve onderworpen is)</i>
Curley	(because he is subject to many accidents, indeed to destruction itself)
Shirley:	(since the object is liable to so many accidents, ay, even to annihilation)

So, if we follow that practice, as I think we should, it appears that we could better translate as follows the two axioms in the first appendix:

KV A1a1:	Substance is, by its nature, prior to all its accidents (modifications).
KV A1a2:	Things that are different are distinguished either really or accidentally.

But why do the English translators avoid the term “accident” and “accidentally” and use only the terms “modification” and “modally,” thus glossing over the fact that Spinoza seems to suggest that what he calls modifications are similar or identical to “accidents”? There are reasons internal to the appendix to justify this. Later in the appendix, in the demonstration of proposition 4, Spinoza adds in parenthesis the Latin term *modaliter* when speaking of *wyzelyk* (*modaliter*) *onderscheiden*. Now, *wyzelyk* and *toevallig* are not the same terms, obviously, but Spinoza in this context also provides an explicit reference to Axiom 2,<sup>5</sup> which makes it reasonably clear that he is talking about the same kind of distinction when speaking of a difference that is *wyzelyk*, *toevallig*, or *modaliter*. Moreover, translating “modification” and “modally” in Appendix 1 makes for a better fit with the terminological inventory of the substance-mode metaphysics of the *Ethics*, where the notions of “accident” and “accidental” do not occupy a prominent place. Spinoza does, of course, use the determination *per accidens* in E1p16c2 when writing that “God is cause through himself and not an accidental cause,” a wording very close to KV, I, ch. iii, §4, already quoted above.

Moreover, in the third part of the *Ethics*, the determination *per accidens* shows up frequently in the theory of affects, in order to explain how a present thing can produce “accidentally” a certain affect in us.<sup>6</sup> But “accidentally” here acquires only a psychological meaning, as something that is perceived by us as accidental. Spinoza never says that something which is thus perceived as accidentally caused can be called an “accident.” And he never suggests in the *Ethics* that a mode or affection can be properly described as an “accident,” or that we can think about a modal distinction, a distinction between modes or between affections, as an “accidental” one. Hence, one could be tempted to project this terminological choice in the *Ethics* back onto the *Short Treatise* and opt for “modification” as a better translation of *toeval* in the Spinozist context.

Such retrospective reasoning would however, I think, be inappropriate. Spinoza was not always averse to using the term “accident.” In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, for example, he speaks of “accidents” rather than “modifications” or “affections” when writing that “no one will ever perceive anything in natural things except accidents.”<sup>7</sup> Probably more to the point, in Ep. 4 to Oldenburg, written around October 1661, Spinoza was perfectly happy about assimilating “modifications” to “accidents,” writing that he understands “by modification, or accident, what is in another and is conceived through what it is in.”<sup>8</sup> This letter seems to reflect the same use of the term “accident” that I suggested we should also see in Spinoza’s use of the term *toeval* in Appendix 1. Hence, these three texts—the TIE, KV-A1, and Ep. 4—together bear witness to an early period when Spinoza was willing to talk of “modifications” in terms of “accidents.”

Why did Spinoza then later drop the notion, to replace it with the term “affection” in E1p1 and E1p4? I think we find the explanation in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, a text published in 1663 but which, according to Jacob Freudenthal, was written before the *Principia Philosophiae Cartesiana*, the introduction to Descartes to which the *Cogitata Metaphysica* are appended. Some commentators have suggested that the *Cogitata Metaphysica* were written as early as late 1660. I think, however, that the attitude towards accidents that it reflects shows that it must have been later than Letter 4, i.e., October 1661, when Spinoza still had no particular concerns with the term. In the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Part 1, Chapter 1, Spinoza writes about the Cartesian distinction between substance and mode:

I only wish it to be noted, concerning this distinction, that we say expressly that being is divided into Substance and Mode, and not into Substance and Accident. For an Accident is nothing but a mode of thinking, inasmuch as it denotes what is only a respect, E.g., when I say that the triangle is moved, the motion is not a

mode of the triangle, but of the body which is moved. Hence the motion is called an accident with respect to the triangle. But with respect to the body, it is called a real being, *or* mode. For the motion cannot be conceived without the body, though it can without the triangle.<sup>9</sup>

Modes alone are “real beings.” Accidents are only “modes of thinking.” We can reconstruct the argument as follows. An accident is a property that can be conceived without conceiving of the concept of the thing of which it is an accident. But movement is an accident in relation to the abstract concept of a triangle because there is nothing in triangularity as such that prescribes a particular pattern of movement. It is perfectly possible to conceive of some movement that a triangular body undergoes without conceiving of the triangularity of that body, say, moving it two feet to the left. The body moved could just as well be round or square, and the movement would still be conceived as perfectly the same, to wit, two feet to the left. A mode, on the contrary, is such that one cannot conceive of it without conceiving also of the thing of which it is the mode. For example, if we move a triangular body two feet to the left, this movement cannot be adequately conceived without conceiving of the body moved. Movement is a real mode of a triangular body when it moves, because any particular body is caught up in a global causal nexus, wherein both its internal (in this case triangular) constitution and external pattern of movement (in this case moving two feet to the left) are equally perfectly determined.

So what are we to make of this? I have presented some evidence in favor of the idea that the double Dutch-Latin expression “*toevallen (modificationes)*” in KV-A1a1 provides us with some important information regarding the early Spinoza’s attitude towards the use of the notion of “accidents.” This information is lost if we conflate the terms in translation, as we have seen is the case in the translations of both Curley and Shirley. Moreover, I have provided evidence that there is a shift away from using the term “accident” when speaking of modes in Spinoza, sometime around 1662, depending on what exact date of composition we ascribe to the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, and which presumably explains why, in the *Ethics*, he will choose to assimilate modes and modifications to affections rather than to accidents. The notion of “accident” is, it appears, too abstract for his taste. One contextual way of explaining this aversion to the term “accident” would be to stress that, as any good Cartesian, he does not believe in scholastic “real accidents.”<sup>10</sup> According to the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza does not believe that one can conceive of properties that are separable from that of which they are properties as anything but “modes of thinking.” The inseparability of actual or

real modes from that of which they are modes is also what Spinoza later stipulates in E1d5: “By mode I understand the affections of a substance, or that which is in another through which it is also conceived.” In scholastic philosophy, however, “real accidents” are properties that can be separated from one thing and attached to another, thereby allowing for a transferal of properties from one subject to another and serving a central purpose in explaining transubstantiation. Thus, Spinoza’s resistance to the term “accident” might reflect his unwillingness to employ a term the traditional connotations of which involved a possibility of separating concrete properties from their concrete subjects.

## Notes

- 1 TTP, ch. ix [C II 217/G III 135–136]: “I’ve also read, and for that matter, known personally, certain Kabbalistic triflers. I’ve never been able to be sufficiently amazed by their madness.”
- 2 Curley’s translation of the KV is found in C I. Shirley’s translation of the KV can be found in Spinoza, *The Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2002).
- 3 Two current French translations have “*La substance existe, de par sa nature, antérieurement à tous ses modes (modifications)*” (“Le Court Traité,” ed. Filippo Mignini, trans. Joël Ganault, in Spinoza, *Œuvres Complètes I: Premiers écrits*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009), 411) and “*La substance est, en vertu de sa nature, antérieure à ses modifications*” (“Court traité,” in B. d. S. Spinoza, *Œuvres, Tome 1: Court traité, Traité de la réforme de l’entendement, Principes de la philosophie de Descartes, Pensées métaphysiques*, trans. Charles Appuhn (Paris: Flammarion, 1966), 159).
- 4 The French translations have “*Les choses qui sont différentes se distinguent ou réellement ou modalement*” (Ganault, 411) and “*Les choses qui sont différentes se distinguent les unes des autres ou bien réellement ou bien modalement*” (Appuhn, 159). Appuhn notes, however, that it is “*fort probable que Spinoza use ici de la terminologie de Descartes qui oppose les choses qui se distinguent réellement (realiter) aux choses qui se distinguent modalement (modaliter)*. Toutefois, le texte hollandais donne ici *toevallig, accidentellement, de même que dans la démonstration de la proposition 1.*”
- 5 The cross reference is mistakenly given as Axiom 3 by Shirley.
- 6 See E3p15; E3p16d; E3p17s; E3da24; E4d5.
- 7 TIE §27 [C I 16/G II 13].
- 8 Ep. 4 [C I 171/G IV 13].

- 9 CM I, ch. i [C I 303/G I 236–237].
- 10 Spinoza discusses “real accidents” in his letter to Oldenburg about Boyle’s treatise on niter from July 17–27, 1663: “But I do not know why he calls the impossibility of a vacuum a Hypothesis, since it follows very clearly from the fact that nothing has no properties. And I am surprised that the Distinguished Gentleman doubts this, since he seems to maintain that there are no real accidents. I ask whether there would not be a real accident if there were Quantity without Substance” [C I 209/G IV 65].

## Metaphysical Rationalism

Martin Lin

*“To try and find out the reason for everything is very dangerous and leads to nothing but disappointment and dissatisfaction.”*

—Queen Victoria

The world, according to Spinoza, is an intelligible place. This conviction is reflected in his philosophy in numerous ways. He believes that the order of being and the order of reason mirror each other, as is evident in the way he defines his basic ontological categories both in terms of what inheres in what and what is conceived through what. Moreover, for him, every event is causally determined in accordance with natural laws that are always and everywhere the same. These laws follow from the eternal and infinite essence of God in the same way that the geometrical properties of a triangle follow from its nature. Thus, laws of nature are intelligible in the same way as the objects of geometry are intelligible, and all events conform to this rational order. Spinoza’s confidence in the rationality of the world is also reflected in his Principle of Sufficient Reason, which says that if something exists, there is a cause or reason why it exists, and if it doesn’t exist, there is an explanation of its nonexistence.

Not only does the world have an intelligible structure, but human reason is capable of discovering that structure. We have, in virtue of being modes of God, an adequate idea of the infinite and eternal divine essence that allows us to infer from it the laws of nature as well as the formal essences of singular things. Indeed, reason in the human mind is no different, for Spinoza, than reason in the divine intellect, and our ideas, insofar as they are rational, are indistinguishable from God’s own. Reason, for Spinoza, is not only intellectually but morally important as well. Our highest good involves using reason to understand God or nature, ourselves, and our place in nature, which results in enduring happiness.



Moreover, for him, the more rational we become the more powerful we are with respect to mastering ourselves and our environment and the more harmoniously we can live with our fellow human beings. Accordingly, many commentators have seen Spinoza's philosophy as a celebration of reason: its ability to penetrate the metaphysical structure of the world, to reveal the natural order, to bring happiness to the human mind and health to the human body.

We could call this conviction in the rational order of existence Spinoza's rationalism. This rationalism, in my view, is a heterogeneous phenomenon. It is a diverse collection of independent doctrines, each one of which expresses a general optimism about reason but none of which are entailed by this optimism. Some commentators, however, have sought to understand Spinoza's rationalism as a more systematic position that can be traced back to a single principle. For example, Michael Della Rocca writes:

Spinoza can be seen as a pure philosopher, always seeking explanation, always refusing to be satisfied with primitive, inexplicable notions. This purity is most evident in his commitment to the principle that each fact has an explanation, that for each thing that exists there is an explanation that suffices for one to see why that thing exists. [...] [T]his principle is known as the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). [...] Spinoza employs the PSR more systematically, perhaps, than has ever been done in the history of philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

To be sure, Spinoza is a pure philosopher who seeks explanations and rejects mysteries and irrational superstition. I have no quarrel with understanding Spinoza in this way. And there can also be no doubt that Spinoza accepts a version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Nevertheless, I will argue here that recent commentators such as Della Rocca (and myself in earlier work) have misunderstood Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason and its role in his system. Spinoza does not regard it as demanding an explanation of every fact but only of facts regarding existence and nonexistence. And, with the exception of the necessary existence of God, Spinoza does not derive any other important doctrines in the *Ethics* by applying the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Moreover, I will consider a number of cases in which commentators have argued that Spinoza could have derived or perhaps did in fact derive, albeit implicitly, doctrines by applying the Principle of Sufficient Reason. I will argue that, in each of these cases, Spinoza did not and indeed could not derive them from his version of that principle. In many cases, I will take Della Rocca's interpretation of Spinoza as my target. Della Rocca has done more than any other commentator to work out the implications of interpreting the Principle of Sufficient Reason as the engine

behind Spinoza's philosophy. Because of the great ingenuity, philosophical acumen, and wit with which Della Rocca develops his interpretation, I think it is very well worthwhile to engage with it in detail, even if, in the end, I think that it is deeply mistaken.

## I. Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason

In the course of arguing for the necessary existence of God in E1p11d2, Spinoza claims that there is a cause or reason for the existence of everything that exists as well as a cause or reason for the nonexistence of everything that does not exist. Although Spinoza himself doesn't use the term, I think that we can fairly call this a Principle of Sufficient Reason. It demands a sufficient reason for a broad topic-neutral domain: facts about existence and nonexistence (existential facts hereafter). And Spinoza believes that we can learn an important truth by applying it: that God necessarily exists. These two features alone justify calling it a Principle of Sufficient Reason. But we should take care not to confuse Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason with similar principles held by other philosophers. In particular, we should take care not to confuse Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason with that of Leibniz, the philosopher who introduces the term into philosophical discussion and who is perhaps most associated with it. For Leibniz, the Principle of Sufficient Reason is not restricted to existential facts. Rather every truth, every fact, and every event has a sufficient cause or reason.<sup>2</sup> What is more, Leibniz boldly declares that it is one of two great principles of all our reasoning, the other being the Principle of Contradiction, and he attempts to solve a wide variety of philosophical problems by deploying it. Spinoza, on the other hand, tucks his Principle of Sufficient Reason away in an alternative demonstration to E1p11, using it only once, to prove the necessary existence of God, never to mention it again. This in itself does not establish that it does not play an important but implicit role in his thinking, but it does shift the burden of proof onto those who wish to argue that it is at work throughout Spinoza's philosophy. Suffice it to say for now that Spinoza presents his Principle of Sufficient Reason very differently and much more modestly than, for example, Leibniz does. Later we will consider more closely the possibility that it plays a greater role behind the scenes.

First, however, we must clarify what Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason says. What is its scope? What is a cause or reason? It might appear that the principle applies to substances and modes because those are the things the

existence of which requires explanation. But this cannot be right because the principle applies to the *non-existence* of substances and modes as well. In the case of nonexistence, there are no substances or modes to receive a cause or reason. What then has a cause or reason in cases of nonexistence? Presumably, it is *the fact* that the substance or mode does exist. And this account smoothly extends to the case of existence as well. If a substance or mode exists, then there is a cause or reason for the fact of its existence. (Beware. There is no reason, at least at this point, to reify these facts. If you like, think of *causes* or *because* as sentential operators and not two-place predicates.)

Some commentators have alleged that Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason is unusually strong because it applies not just to facts about existence but also to facts about nonexistence.<sup>3</sup> This is misleading. Leibniz, for example, thinks that *all* facts require a cause or reason.<sup>4</sup> This entails that facts about nonexistence require a cause or reason. Therefore, Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason is stronger than Spinoza's because while Leibniz's entails Spinoza's, the converse does not hold. Moreover, there are many facts that do not pertain to existence or nonexistence, and Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason requires these facts to have a cause or reason but Spinoza's does not. Furthermore, every universal generalization being logically equivalent to a negative existential (i.e., that all ravens are black is logically equivalent to the claim that there does not exist a nonblack raven), any Principle of Sufficient Reason that applies to universal generalizations *ipso facto* applies to negative existentials as well. Thus, Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason could only be stronger than a Principle of Sufficient Reason that did not apply to universal generalizations, which would be a very weak Principle of Sufficient Reason indeed.

Many recent commentators have thought that, contrary to what I have just said, Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason extends not just to facts about existence and nonexistence but to all facts.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, although I now reject it, I myself have previously defended such an interpretation. Although this appears to outrun Spinoza's text by a wide margin, there is an apparently cogent argument to the effect that if the Principle of Sufficient Reason applies to all existential facts, then it applies to all facts without restriction.<sup>6</sup> The argument for this flawed conclusion proceeds as follows. Modes are substances insofar as they satisfy some condition. Any condition satisfied by a substance grounds the existence of some mode. The existence of a mode requires a cause or reason. Thus, for facts about a substance's existence (i.e., for facts about a substance satisfying some condition) there is a cause or reason. But every fact entails the existence of a mode. This is because for any fact we can abstract a condition from it by means

of the *being such* device. The claim that mastodons are bigger than dodo birds does not appear to be a claim about the existence or nonexistence of things. (It is not, for example, equivalent to the statement that there does not exist a mastodon that is not bigger than a dodo. Even if there were a dwarf-mastodon that was smaller than a dodo or if mastodon-fetuses were smaller than full-grown dodos, it would still be true that mastodons are bigger than dodos.) But nonetheless we can abstract a condition from it that is satisfied by God: being such that mastodons are bigger than dodo birds. Because every condition that God satisfies determines a mode to exist, this fact is determined by something that requires a cause or reason. The fact that mastodons are bigger than dodos is nothing over and above the mode that exists in virtue of God being such that mastodons are bigger than dodos. For this reason, if the existence of every mode requires a cause or reason then every fact requires a cause or reason.

This argument rests on the false assumption that every condition satisfied by a substance determines the existence of a mode. Every condition *cannot* be a modemaker. This is because conditions are cheap and abundant and so do not obey the strictures placed on modes by Spinoza. For example, if every condition were a modemaker, then there would be modes that splayed across multiple attributes in an unacceptable way. For example, *being such that a body exists and a mind exists* is a condition satisfied by God. But if this condition were a modemaker, then there is a mode that is not fully conceivable under a single attribute. Every mode can be fully conceived under a single attribute and thus this condition cannot be a modemaker. There must be, therefore, a distinguished class of conditions that are modemakers. For example, it would be plausible to assume that, for Spinoza, the modemaking conditions are natural, attribute-bound, and non-relational. There must be other conditions as well. For example, God satisfies the condition *is infinite* but there is presumably no mode that is God insofar as he is infinite. If there were, would it be a mode of extension, a mode of thought, or a mode of some other attribute? None of these answers seem acceptable. But neither would it be acceptable to answer that it is a mode but not a mode of any attribute. Thus, the condition *is infinite* cannot be a modemaker. Spinoza is not explicit about how the modemaking conditions are restricted. I suspect, however, that the modemaking conditions for finite modes under the attribute of extension are those that result in the existence of bodies, and the modemaking conditions under the attribute of thought result in the existence of ideas that represent those bodies. The modemaking conditions for infinite modes will be those that result in the laws of nature and “the whole of nature” that has all finite modes as parts discussed in Lemma 7 of

the *Short Physical Digression* following E2p13s. There are many truths that do not determine the existence of bodies, the ideas that represent them, the laws that govern them and those ideas, and the whole that those bodies and ideas compose. Thus, there are many truths that are not within the scope of Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason.

Before looking at alleged uses of Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason, let us first consider a useful distinction made by Leibniz between different ways that a class of truths can relate to it.<sup>7</sup> First of all, the Principle of Sufficient Reason can *apply* to a certain class of truths. These are the truths that instantiate the principle. Leibniz, for example, holds that the Principle of Sufficient Reason applies to every truth, and Spinoza thinks that it applies to existential truths. These are the truths that have a sufficient reason. Second, the Principle of Sufficient Reason can *ground* a class of truths. For example, for Leibniz, all contingent truths are grounded by the Principle of Sufficient Reason in the sense that they are true because the Principle of Sufficient Reason is true.<sup>8</sup> Although, for him, necessary truths have a sufficient reason, they are not grounded by it. Thus, the class of truths that are grounded by the Principle of Sufficient Reason is, for Leibniz, a subset of the class of truths to which it applies. Spinoza never explicitly tells us that any truth is true in virtue of the truth of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. The one truth to which he explicitly applies it, the existence of God, is a case of a truth that does not depend upon the truth of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. God, Spinoza tells us, is self-caused. That is to say, he exists entirely in virtue of his nature or essence. Assuming that the Principle of Sufficient Reason is not part of God's nature, his existence does not depend on it. Third, there are truths that can be *learned* by applying the Principle of Sufficient Reason.<sup>9</sup> Leibniz, for example, thought that we could prove the existence of God, the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles, the relationality of space, and the nonexistence of atoms by applying the Principle of Sufficient Reason. (It is worth noting that some of the truths that we can learn from the Principle of Sufficient Reason, according to Leibniz, do not depend upon it. For example, the necessary existence of God can be learned by applying the Principle of Sufficient Reason but it is a necessary truth and hence, for Leibniz, it depends not on the Principle of Sufficient Reason but on the Principle of Contradiction.) Spinoza only ever explicitly tries to derive the necessary existence of God from the Principle of Sufficient Reason but some commentators, most notably Della Rocca, have argued that Spinoza arrives at many other elements of his system by applying the Principle of Sufficient Reason, albeit "off-stage" as it were. We will consider some of those claims in this chapter with an eye toward determining the extent

to which the Principle of Sufficient Reason plays role in Spinoza's system beyond what is manifest in his official demonstrations.

I think it's fair to say that of the three relations that the Principle of Sufficient Reason can bear to a class of truths—applying to, grounding, and allowing us to discover—the latter two are, in many respects, more interesting and important than the first. So long as a philosopher admits that anything has an explanation, she will accept that the Principle of Sufficient Reason applies to some truths so long as that principle is understood in a suitably restricted way. Thus, merely thinking that everything (suitably restricted) has an explanation is not enough to make a philosopher an adherent of the Principle of Sufficient Reason in any interesting sense. The more permissive or topic-neutral the restriction, however, the more such a principle looks like something deserving to be called a Principle of Sufficient Reason. But such a principle becomes even more philosophically significant if it can be used as an instrument of discovery or if it grounds certain truths. As we have seen, Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason is restricted in a topic-neutral way. It applies to existential truths. In what follows, we will look to see what philosophical doctrines can be learned by applying it and if Spinoza thinks that any philosophically interesting truths are grounded by it.

## II. Necessitarianism

Philosophers have often thought that commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason leads to necessitarianism, the doctrine that every truth is necessarily true,<sup>10</sup> and most commentators believe that Spinoza is both committed to the Principle of Sufficient Reason and a necessitarian.<sup>11</sup> Is he motivated to be one by his commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason?

It is worth noting that Spinoza's explicit statement of necessitarianism is more restricted than is usually supposed. For example, it is often alleged that Spinoza believes that every truth is necessary.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the only things that E1p29 says are necessary are the existence of modes and their actions. E1p33 also states that the order and connection of things is necessary. Thus, it appears that, in those texts, he commits himself only to the necessity of the following classes of truths: (1) existential truths; (2) causal truths; and (3) what we might call "structural truths," that is, truths about the order and connection of things. To be sure, Spinoza may believe or have reason to believe that other truths are necessary as well but those truths are not the subject of E1p29 and E1p33, and we cannot

assume without argument that his conclusions there generalize further. I cannot pursue this issue further here and will leave it as an open question.

Why does Spinoza believe that existential, causal, and structural truths are necessary and does the Principle of Sufficient Reason play any role in his thinking? Let us look more closely at E1p29 and its demonstration, which read:

In nature there is nothing contingent, but all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and produce an effect in a certain way. [E1p29]

Whatever is, is in God (by E1p15); but God cannot be called a contingent thing. For (by E1p11) he exists necessarily, not contingently. Next, the modes of the divine nature have also followed from it necessarily and not contingently (by E1p16)—either insofar as the divine nature is considered absolutely (by E1p21) or insofar as it is considered to be determined to act in a certain way (by E1p28). Further, God is the cause of these modes not only insofar as they simply exist (by E1p24c), but also (by E1p26) insofar as they are considered to be determined to produce an effect. For if they have not been determined by God, then (by E1p26) it is impossible, not contingent, that they should determine themselves. Conversely (by E1p27) if they have been determined by God, it is not contingent, but impossible, that they should render themselves undetermined. So all things have been determined from the necessity of the divine nature, not only to exist, but to exist in a certain way, and to produce effects in a certain way. There is nothing contingent, q.e.d. [E1p29d]

This **argument for necessitarianism with respect to existential and causal truths** (ECN) can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Everything is either God or a mode of God. (E1p15)
- (2) The existence of God is necessary. (E1p11)
- (3) The existence of the modes is necessitated by the existence of God. (E1p16)
- (4) Whatever follows from something necessary is itself necessary. (suppressed premise)
- (5) The existence of the modes is necessary. (From 3 and 4)
- (6) Causal relations between the modes are necessitated by the existence of God. (E1p26)
- (7) Causal relations between the modes are necessary. (From 4 and 5)
- (8) No substance or mode exists contingently and no casual relation obtains between contingently. (From 1, 2, 5, and 7)

The Principle of Sufficient Reason is not a premise of this argument and so it appears that Spinoza does not arrive at his necessitarianism by means of it. Of course, the Principle of Sufficient Reason is a premise of Spinoza's argument for

the necessary existence of God, premise (2). But the necessary existence of God alone does not establish that every existential and causal truth is necessary. Many theists coherently believe that God exists necessarily but that not everything else exists and acts necessarily. Thus, although it is true that **the argument for necessitarianism with respect to existential and causal truths** depends on the Principle of Sufficient Reason to the extent that Spinoza's argument for the necessary existence of God depends upon the Principle of Sufficient Reason, the claim that Spinoza's necessitarianism depends on the Principle of Sufficient Reason suggests a much more extensive connection than that.

Apart from their connection to the necessary existence of God, do any of the other premises of **the argument for necessitarianism with respect to existential and causal truths** rely on or entail the Principle of Sufficient Reason? The first premise, everything is either God or a mode of God, follows from the fact that everything is either a substance or a mode and that there is only one substance, namely, God. Spinoza's argument for substance monism does not rely upon the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Rather, it depends on the assumption that there cannot be more than one substance with a given attribute. Although some commentators, including Della Rocca,<sup>13</sup> have seen this premise as deriving from the Principle of Sufficient Reason via the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles, it does not, as I will argue later in this paper. Does the claim that everything is a substance or a mode entail the Principle of Sufficient Reason? It might be argued that it does by claiming that **conceiving implies explaining** (CIE):

- (1) A substance is conceived through itself. (E1d3)
- (2) A mode is conceived through the substance in which it inheres. (E1d5)
- (3) Everything is a substance or a mode. (E1p4d)
- (4) Everything is conceived through something. (From 1, 2, and 3)
- (5) For all  $x$  and all  $y$ , if  $x$  is conceived through  $y$ , then  $x$  is explained by  $y$ .
- (6) Therefore, everything is explained by something. (From 4 and 5)

Despite first impressions, the conclusion (6) is not Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason nor does the Principle of Sufficient Reason entail it. This is because Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason requires explanations for facts about nonexistence, which are neither substances nor modes, and thus fall outside of the domain of Spinoza's quantifiers. For this reason, the conclusion (6) could be true even if Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason is false.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it does establish the positive part of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and thus could be viewed as partial support of it. For this reason, it is worth asking whether or not it is a genuinely Spinozistic argument.



The credentials of premises 1–4 above are beyond dispute, but what about premise 5? Della Rocca has argued that a number of texts seem to imply that if  $x$  is conceived through  $y$ , then  $x$  is understood through  $y$ .<sup>15</sup> If we also assumed that if  $x$  is understood through  $y$ , then  $y$  explains  $x$ , we would have (5): For all  $x$  and all  $y$ , if  $x$  is conceived through  $y$ , then  $x$  is explained by  $y$ . The relevant texts do not, however, strongly support Della Rocca's contention.

The first text called upon by Della Rocca is E1a5, which says:

Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood [*intelligi*] through one another, or the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other. [E1a5]

In this text, Spinoza appears to equate understanding one thing through another with conceiving one thing through another. If we assume that understanding is the state produced by successful explanation, then we might think that Spinoza is equating conceiving one thing through another with explaining one thing through another.

But the Latin word *intelligere*, like the English *understand*, can be used to express meanings that have no connection to explanation. For example, it can mean “to grasp,” as in grasping a meaning or a concept. According to this usage, if I say that bachelorhood is partially understood (i.e., *intelligi*) through being unmarried, that is to say, the concept of bachelorhood involves the concept of being unmarried, I am not asserting any equivalence between  $x$  is *conceived through* and  $x$  is *explained by*. I am merely asserting that the concept of a bachelor involves the concept of being unmarried. Likewise, a natural interpretation of 1a5 is that one thing can be grasped in thought by grasping something else in thought only if the concept of the one involves the concept of the other. Thus, this text does not appear to offer much evidence in favor of premise (5) of the claim that **conceiving implies explaining**.

Another piece of putative evidence for premise (5) is that Spinoza sometimes says that substances are *conceived* under an attribute, and in other texts Spinoza says that substances are *explained* by their attributes. Della Rocca alleges this is because *being conceived by* and *being explained by* [*explicatur*] are the same relation.<sup>16</sup> But this inference is hasty. First of all, it would not be particularly surprising if substance and its attributes simply stood in more than one relation. Moreover, it is not clear that *explicatur* means *is explained by* in this context. It can also be translated as *is conveyed by*, *is exhibited by*, and *is expressed by*. I argue elsewhere that the attributes are the essence of a substance, which is conceived under various guises.<sup>17</sup> But Spinoza, like many seventeenth-century

philosophers, isn't always careful about distinguishing a thing from the concept of that thing. Consequently, he doesn't always clearly distinguish the essence, which is conceived under a guise, and the guise under which it is conceived. I am inclined, therefore, to think that when Spinoza says that substance is both conceived under and exhibited by the attributes, he means that our cognitive grasp of substance is mediated by the guise by means of which it is presented to our intellect. But this does not imply that to conceive of something is to have an explanation of it in the sense of knowing its cause or reason. Therefore, these texts do not provide evidence in favor of premise (5): for all  $x$  and all  $y$ , if  $x$  is conceived through  $y$ , then  $x$  is explained by  $y$ .

Della Rocca also cites E2p7s, where Spinoza writes:

The formal being of the idea of the circle can be perceived [*percipi*] only through another mode of thinking, as its proximate cause, and that mode again through another, and so on, to infinity. [E2p7s]

Why does Spinoza say that we can "perceive" something only through a cause? A possible answer is that *perceives* means *conceives* and *conceives* means *explains*. Then Spinoza would just be saying that we can *explain* something only through a cause, which is a sensible doctrine. But that *conceives* means *explains* is an unnecessary hypothesis in this context. In Latin, *percipere* can mean *to understand*. Thus, in this text, Spinoza simply means that things are understood through their causes. Della Rocca points out that Spinoza sometimes uses *percipere* and *concipere* interchangeably (e.g., E2p38d or E2p49s). But this shows very little because *percipere* is a word with several meanings including both to understand and to conceive. What remains to be shown is that Spinoza is using it to express the same meaning in both contexts and there is no evidence from E2p7s or elsewhere that this is the case. I conclude that the textual basis for attributing to Spinoza premise (5) of the claim that **conceiving implies explaining** is slight.

Let us now consider premise (3) of **the argument for necessitarianism with respect to existential and causal truths**, which says that the modes are necessitated by the necessary existence of God. Does it rest upon the Principle of Sufficient Reason? Spinoza argues for this claim in the demonstration to 1p16 where he attempts to show that the world is produced by God. He argues for this by saying that God is infinitely real and the more reality a thing has, the more things follow from its essence. Therefore, infinitely many things follow from God's essence. What Spinoza means by these dark sayings is far from clear but Della Rocca thinks that Spinoza is committed to the claim that God is

infinitely real by his commitment to the Principle of Sufficient Reason.<sup>18</sup> (Della Rocca's statement of the argument relates somewhat loosely to the text so, in what follows, I have adapted his formulation to bring it closer to the letter of E1p16d.) Spinoza, Della Rocca notes, equates reality with power. If there were a possible mode that did not follow from God's nature, then there must be, by the Principle of Sufficient Reason, a cause or reason for the fact that it doesn't. There is no other substance that could prevent it following from God's nature and no mere mode could prevent it. There is, therefore, no possible explanation for this lack and thus it is impossible. Della Rocca concludes that every possible mode follows from God's nature, that is, God has the greatest possible degree of reality.

Della Rocca's argument is not Spinozistic because it assumes that there must be a cause or reason for facts of the form *substance S does not have power P*. This is not an existential truth and so Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason does not require a cause or reason for it.

Indeed, it is open to doubt that any sensible Principle of Sufficient Reason could demand an explanation of such truths. To see this, suppose that God lacked the power to cause some possible mode *m*. If God lacked this power, then his essence would not necessitate *m*. But because God's essence and power are one and the same, God lacking a power that he actually has is the same thing as having a different essence than he actually has. Thus, saying that if God lacked a power there would have to be an explanation of this lack is the same as saying that if God had a different essence there would have to be an explanation of this fact. But if it were legitimate to demand an explanation why God has the essence he would have if his essence were different, then it would be legitimate to demand an explanation of the fact that God has the essence that he actually does. To ask why something has the essence that it does is thus tantamount to asking why something is what it is. Consider the essentialist truth that gold atoms are gold atoms in virtue of having atomic number 79. This fact explains why atoms with atomic number 79 are gold atoms. But suppose someone wanted an explanation of this truth and asked, why are gold atoms what they are in virtue of having atomic number 79? There is no explanation of this fact. Having atomic number 79 is just what it is to be a gold atom. Similarly, there is no explanation of the fact that God has the powers that he does. Having such power is just what it is to be God.<sup>19</sup>

Let us now consider premise (6) of **the argument for necessitarianism with respect to existential and causal truths**, which says that the causal relations in which the modes stand follow from the divine nature. Why does Spinoza believe this? In causing the existence of the modes, God *ipso facto* realizes their essences

because, as previously mentioned, the realization of an essence is the satisfaction of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of a thing.<sup>20</sup> The essence of a thing determines its causal powers, which in turn determines a thing's actions and its role in the natural order.<sup>21</sup> The causal powers of a thing determine its actions because Spinoza defines action in terms of causation. Insofar as a thing produces an effect in virtue of its essence alone, it acts.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, passions are changes in a mode's state that are determined by its own essence under the influence of external causes.<sup>23</sup> These external causes act on the modes in virtue of their essences. Thus, the behavior of one who suffers passions is determined by its essence and the essence of external causes.<sup>24</sup> Note that both actions and passions are fully determined by the essences of things taken together. Jointly the actions and passions of all the modes constitute the order and connection of nature. Thus, in explaining the existence of the modes, God thereby also explains the actions of the modes and the causal order that they manifest. And yet, premise (6) does not follow from Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason. Rather it is dictated by Spinoza's conception of causation, the relationship between God and his modes, and the relationship between existence and essence. He argues for it in E1p26 and E1p26d, where he says:

A thing which has been determined to produce an effect has necessarily been determined in this way by God. [E1p26]

That through which things are said to be determined to produce an effect must be something positive (as is known through itself). And so, God, from the necessity of his nature, is the efficient cause both of its essence and of its existence (by E1p25 and E1p16). [E1p26d]

Spinoza's reasoning for this argument can be paraphrased thus:

- (1) A mode is determined to produce an effect through something positive.
- (2) The only positive things that could determine a mode to produce an effect are the existence and the essence of the mode.
- (3) God determines both the existence and the essence of things. (E1p16 and E1p25)
- (4) If  $x$  determines  $y$  and  $y$  determines  $z$ , then  $x$  determines  $z$ .
- (5) Therefore, a mode is determined to produce an effect by God.

This argument does not have Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason as a premise. Does Spinoza arrive at any of them by applying the Principle of Sufficient Reason? It would appear not. Spinoza says premise (1) is known through itself. Premise (2) is a suppressed premise, the falsity of which appears

compatible with Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason. Premise (3) derives from E1p16, which we have seen does not rely on the Principle of Sufficient Reason and E1p25, which is a direct consequence of E1p16. The falsity of premise (4) also appears compatible with the truth of the Principle of Sufficient Reason because it is coherent to think that every existential fact has an explanation but that explanation is not transitive. Consequently, premise (6) of **the argument for necessitarianism with respect to existential and causal truths** is neither learned through nor grounded by the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

We must conclude that Spinoza's argument for necessitarianism does not depend on his Principle of Sufficient Reason beyond the role it plays in establishing premise (3), the necessary existence of God. It is worth considering, nevertheless, whether Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason might commit him to necessitarianism for other reasons. Consider the following well-known argument for necessitarianism from the Principle of Sufficient Reason<sup>25</sup>:

- (1) There are contingent truths. (Assumption for *reductio*)
- (2) There is a cause or reason for every truth. (The Principle of Sufficient Reason)
- (3)  $p$ , the conjunction of every contingent truth, is contingent.
- (4) There is a cause or reason for  $p$ . (From 2)
- (5) The cause or reason of  $p$  is either a truth that is either contingent or necessary.
- (6) If it is contingent, then some contingent truth explains itself.
- (7) No contingent truth explains itself.
- (8) If it is necessary, then  $p$  is necessary.
- (9) Therefore, there are no contingent truths.

Notice that if we substitute Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason, that there is a cause or reason for every *existential* truth, for (2), we will not be able to derive the conclusion. This is because not every contingent truth is existential (e.g., *mastodons are bigger than dodos*) and so the conjunction of every contingent truth is not existential. Consequently, Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason does not tell us whether or not  $p$  has an explanation.

### III. The Identification of Existence and Conceivability

Spinoza thinks that something exists if and only if it is conceivable.<sup>26</sup> Della Rocca has argued that we can understand Spinoza's commitment to the equivalence of

existence and conceivability as stemming from two commitments, both of which derive from the Principle of Sufficient Reason.<sup>27</sup> One is that existence cannot be brute and primitive and must instead be explained in terms of something else. Fortunately, according to Della Rocca, Spinoza can explain existence in terms of conceivability. The other is that existence is identical to conceivability. It is not clear that these two claims are consistent: if existence is identical to conceivability and is explained by conceivability, then existence is explained in terms of existence, which Della Rocca explicitly denies when he says that, for Spinoza, existence must be explained in terms of something else. I am not sure how to resolve this tension, and so I will focus on each of these claims separately, beginning with the claim of identity.

Della Rocca begins by noting that in E1p20, Spinoza says that the same attributes that explain God's essence also explain his existence and therefore his essence and existence are one and the same. Della Rocca discerns in this inference the following principle:

- If there is no difference in the things that *a* and *b* are explained by, then *a* and *b* are identical.<sup>28</sup>

He thinks that this principle follows from the Principle of Sufficient Reason because nonidentity would be brute if two things were different despite being explained by all the same things. God's essence is given by his definition, which says that he is an absolutely infinite substance. Substances in turn are defined as things that are conceived through themselves. God's essence, Della Rocca concludes, is his conceivability. Thus, God's essence is identical to his conceivability. God's essence is identical to his existence. Thus, God's existence is identical to his conceivability. Next Della Rocca argues that the existence of modes too is identical to conceivability. If, in the case of modes, existence and conceivability are different, then, by the Principle of Sufficient Reason, it cannot be a brute fact that they are different. But their existence and conceivability are necessarily coextensive. Della Rocca asserts that given their necessary coextensiveness, nothing could explain their difference. Therefore, Spinoza is under pressure from the Principle of Sufficient Reason to identify them.

But the identification of existence and conceivability would make it possible to infer, from certain Spinozistic doctrines, claims that Spinoza would reject. For example, in E1d1, Spinoza says:

By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or [*sive*] that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing. [E1d1]

If Della Rocca is correct and existence and conceivability are identical, then we ought to be able to paraphrase E1d1 by substituting “conceivable” for “existing”:

By cause of itself I understand that whose essence involves existence, or [*sive*]  
that whose nature cannot be conceived except as conceivable.

The resulting paraphrase defines self-causation as having an essence that must be conceived as conceivable. Thus, anything that is not self-caused must have an essence that can be conceived of as inconceivable. Any actually existing mode has an essence that is conceivable, but do any of them have essences that can be conceived of as inconceivable? What would it mean to conceive of a conceivable essence as inconceivable? To conceive of something *x* that is actually *F* being *not-F* is to conceive of *x* as *not-F*. The problem here is not the Berkeleian point that if *F* denotes *being conceivable*, we cannot conceive of it as unconceived because we are conceiving of it. The Berkeleian point is a mistake that results from confusing properties of the representation with represented properties. Rather, the problem is that finite modes are not conceived through their essence alone but through their essence in conjunction with the substance in which they inhere. And so, to conceive of the essence of a mode as inconceivable would be to conceive of something that is either actually self-consistent as possibly inconsistent or actually consistent with the divine essence as inconsistent with the divine essence. Both are impossible because essences are such that they are self-consistent or consistent with another necessarily. We are thus forced to conclude that every conceivable thing is self-caused. But Socrates is conceivable, and so Socrates must be self-caused. This consequence is unacceptable to Spinoza because he thinks that no finite mode is self-caused. Given this, Spinoza must acknowledge a distinction between conceivability and existence on pain of contradiction.

What about Della Rocca's claim that the necessary coextensiveness of existence and conceivability puts pressure on Spinoza to identify them? Even if these relations were coextensive or even necessarily coextensive, I do not think that this would put pressure on Spinoza to conclude that they were identical. Della Rocca thinks that relations and properties that are necessarily coextensive are either the same or their difference is brute. Thus, he thinks that Spinoza must individuate relations and properties intensionally. But if Spinoza is a necessitarian (although I have only argued for a restricted necessitarianism here, I believe, as many commentators do, that Spinoza's necessitarianism is unrestricted), intensions collapse into extensions. An extensional principle of individuation for properties is exceedingly coarse-grained. Consider the properties of *having*

*a heart* and *having kidneys*. These properties are coextensive because every creature with a heart also has kidneys and vice versa, and yet having a heart is manifestly not the same as having kidneys. Seeking greater fineness of grain, many philosophers appeal to intensional notions. An intension is a function from possible worlds to extension. Thus, while “having a heart” and “having kidneys” have the same extension, they have different intensions because there are possible creatures with hearts but not kidneys and vice versa. The way of intensions is not open to Spinoza because as a necessitarian there is only one possible world and so there is no difference between extension and intension. Unless Spinoza is stuck with such a coarse-grained conception of properties that he cannot tell the difference between having a heart and having kidneys, he will need hyperintensional notions, that is, notions that differ despite having the same intensions (and, *a fortiori*, the same extensions). Della Rocca assumes a difference in properties must either be explained by a difference in intension or be seen as brute and inexplicable, neglecting the possibility that the difference is explained by a difference in hyperintension.

Furthermore, the version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason that Della Rocca’s argument requires rules out any brute facts, including brute facts about the identity and nonidentity of properties. Spinoza’s Principle of Sufficient Reason, however, does not require explanations for facts about the identity and nonidentity of properties, only for facts about existence and nonexistence. As such, it does not put any pressure on him to identify necessarily co-extensive properties even granting that such an explanation would be impossible.

Let us now consider Della Rocca’s claim that conceivability explains existence; things exist in virtue of being conceivable. I suppose that there is a sense in which this is true, but it also runs the risk of flattening the difference between what is self-caused and what is not. God’s existence is fully explained by his essence. Thus, in a way, his existence is explained by his conceivability. What is the explanation of the existence of any mode? It is partially explained by the fact that it is conceivable and partially explained by the fact that God has infinite reality and thus every conceivable thing follows from his nature. It is true that, for an intellect that adequately grasps all things, the nonexistence of any actually existing mode would be inconceivable. But it wouldn’t exist simply in virtue of being conceivable but rather being conceivable through a substance that is infinitely real. To be sure, such an absolutely real substance is the only conceivable substance and thus any conceivable mode is conceived through such a substance. Nevertheless, if someone were to ask why a given mode exists, and she was told it was because it was conceivable, she would not have the complete



explanation unless she also was told that it is conceivable through a necessary being that has infinite reality. To the extent that this latter information is an indispensable part of the explanation, the existence of the modes is not fully explained in terms of mere conceivability.

#### IV. The Identity of Indiscernibles

Some commentators have thought that Spinoza is motivated to accept his version of the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles because he accepts the Principle of Sufficient Reason.<sup>29</sup> In E1p5d, Spinoza says that “if there were two or more distinct substances, then they would have to be distinguished from one another either by a difference in their attributes or by a difference in their affections.” Spinoza’s reasons for believing this are unclear. He cites E1p4, which says that *if* two distinct substances are distinguished, then they are distinguished by a difference in attribute or mode. But that proposition makes only a conditional claim and does not say that distinct substances must be distinguished, which is required by the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles. Neither does the demonstration of E1p4 offer any insight because it focuses exclusively on the question of what entities are available to distinguish different substances and does not address the question of whether or not different substances must be distinguished in the first place.<sup>30</sup>

Does Spinoza implicitly rely on more cogent reasoning to arrive at his Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles? It is tempting to think that the Principle of Sufficient Reason plays a role here because it is sometimes alleged that the Principle of Sufficient Reason entails the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles and Spinoza undoubtedly accepts a version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. How does the Principle of Sufficient Reason entail the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles? Typically, something like the following argument is invoked.<sup>31</sup> Call a truth *an identity* if it results from an object satisfying an identity predicate such as *is identical to B* or *is not identical to B*. Call a truth *a qualitative truth* if it results from an object satisfying a purely qualitative predicate, which is a predicate that is not formed using any device of direct reference such as a proper name or a demonstrative. There is an explanation of every truth (i.e., the unrestricted Principle of Sufficient Reason). Therefore, there is an explanation for every identity. The only thing that can explain an identity is a qualitative truth. If qualitative truths explain identities, then, for any objects A and B, if A and B satisfy all the same qualitative predicates, then they satisfy all the

same identity predicates. Suppose for *reductio* that there were two distinct yet indiscernible objects A and B. A and B satisfy all the same qualitative predicates because they are indiscernible. Thus, they satisfy all the same identity predicates. But this is contrary to the supposition that they are distinct. Therefore, there are no two distinct yet indiscernible objects.

But the version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason used in this argument is not Spinoza's. To see this, suppose there were two indiscernible yet numerically distinct substances A and B. It is true that A is not B and B is not A. Suppose further that there is no explanation why A is not B. Does this scenario violate Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason? Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason only requires an explanation of the existence of A and the existence of B and therefore it requires an explanation of the fact that A is not B only if this fact is identical to an existence fact. But this cannot be because identity is not existence. To see this, consider the fact that we cannot replace every sentential clause concerning identity with a clause concerning existence *salva veritate*. For example, we consider the following true statement: If the tallest man is six feet tall, then the youngest man is six feet tall because the tallest man is identical to the youngest man. There is no sentence that concerns existence alone that can replace the sentential clause following the "because" *salva veritate*. For example, even supposing the original sentence is true, the following is false: If the tallest man is six feet tall, then the youngest man is six feet tall because the tallest man exists and the youngest man exists.

Indeed, it is far from clear that any version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason entails the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles. The argument for the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles from the Principle of Sufficient Reason considered earlier must assume that identities are grounded by qualitative truths. Otherwise, the nonidentity of A and B could be explained by the fact that, necessarily, A is not B or that it is part of A's essence that A is not B or that it is a conceptual truth that A is not B. Or the A is not B in virtue of A's haecceity. Thus, identities could have explanations even if the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles is false. Only when we make that further assumption that identity truths are grounded by qualitative truths do we get the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles. But this assumption is sufficient all by itself to derive the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles and indeed is logically equivalent to it.<sup>32</sup> The Principle of Sufficient Reason is completely otiose in this argument.

Although it is a somewhat philosophically disappointing conclusion, the available evidence strongly suggests that Spinoza puts his Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles into his system by hand rather than deriving it from more

basic principles. There is no textual evidence to support the contention that he derives it from his Principle of Sufficient Reason, and there are no philosophical considerations that would lead us to conclude that he should or could derive it from that principle.

## Conclusion

For Spinoza, the world is an intelligible place. The existence and nonexistence of everything have a cause or reason. What is more, this cause or reason is sufficient for it. Given the cause or reason, it either must exist or couldn't exist. This is his Principle of Sufficient Reason. But there are other ways in which the world is intelligible as well. Everything has an essence that fully determines a complete set of intrinsic properties, causal powers, and actions. The interaction of the essences fully determines the complete set of passive affects or passions found throughout nature. These causal relations are subsumed under exceptionless laws. Moreover, these laws, essences, and intrinsic properties are knowable by us. The eternal and infinite essence of God is known to us in virtue of the fact that our natures are finite expressions of God's essence and thus we have an adequate idea of it. Every idea that follows from an adequate idea is itself adequate. The laws of nature are infinite modes and as such follow from the absolute nature of God. Thus, we can have an adequate idea of them. The essences of singular things also follow from the absolute nature of God and we so can know them too. Moreover, the intrinsic properties of things which are common to everything falling under the same attribute are equally in the part as in the whole and thus we can have adequate knowledge of them as well.

I have argued that there are many facts to which Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason does not apply. Are these facts brute or unintelligible? For example, the fact that causation is distinct from conception is not within the scope of Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason. Is it thereby unintelligible? I think not. Consider the properties of *being triangular* and *being trilateral*. They are, I would argue, distinct and yet necessarily coextensive. What if someone were to ask why they were distinct? What could we say to her to explain their distinctness? I can imagine no more effective procedure than trying to explain what a side is and what an angle is and then explaining *being triangular* and *being trilateral* in terms of them. At bottom, however, this procedure simply aims at giving her the concepts *triangular* and *trilateral*. Anyone who doubts that they are different simply doesn't possess the relevant concepts. (Or is biting a bullet.)

The distinction isn't brute in the sense of being arbitrary or unintelligible. If it is correct to call it brute it is only because it is basic or fundamental. Similarly, consider someone who wants an explanation of why Socrates is Socrates. She does not wonder, for example, why the teacher of Plato is the husband of Xanthippe. Rather she wonders why that man (perhaps she is pointing at him from across the agora) is himself. What an odd question! But perhaps we could answer it by saying simply that everything is what it is and not another. And if an explanation were requested for this? I do not believe an explanation is possible but it nevertheless seems incorrect to say that this fact is arbitrary and unintelligible. It is, rather, basic and fundamental. Seeing that it must be so is a prerequisite for thinking about anything at all. Thus, I do not think that facts such as the distinctness of causation, conception, and inherence or the distinction between the attributes are violations of the Principle of Sufficient Reason in the sense that they are arbitrary or unintelligible aspects of the world. Rather, they are not the sorts of things to which a Principle of Sufficient Reason ought to apply. Sometimes your spade is turned not because you've accidentally hit an arbitrary or unintelligible stone but because you hit the bottom.

## Notes

- 1 Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 30.
- 2 GP VI 612/L 646.
- 3 Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 4; Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "The Sirens of Elea: Rationalism, Monism and Idealism in Spinoza," in *Debates in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Stewart Duncan and Antonia LoLordo (New York: Routledge, 2012), 78; Martin Lin "Rationalism and Necessitarianism," *Noûs* 46, no. 3 (2012): 418–448, here 420–421.
- 4 GP VI 612/L 646.
- 5 Don Garrett, "Spinoza's 'Ontological' Argument," *Philosophical Review* 88, no. 2 (1979): 198–223, here 202, fn5; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 4; Martin Lin, "The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza," in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). NB. I have changed my mind about many things in this article.
- 6 Lin, "Rationalism and Necessitarianism": 420–421. See also Michael Della Rocca, "Interpreting Spinoza: The Real Is the Rational," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 3 (2015): 525–526.
- 7 See Robert Sleight, "Leibniz on the Two Great Principles of All Our Reasoning," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 8, no. 1 (1982): 193–216, here 194–195.

- 8 A VI.4.1616; GP VII 355–356/LC 15–16.
- 9 GP VII 355–356; LC L2; AG 321.
- 10 Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1984), 115; Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 77–78; Lin, “The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza,” and Lin, “Rationalism and Necessitarianism,” 420–421; Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 4th edn. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2015), 150–153.
- 11 For an opposing view, see Edwin Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 106–109, and Edwin Curley and Gregory Walski, “Spinoza's Necessitarianism Reconsidered,” in *New Essays on the Rationalists*, ed. Rocco J. Gennaro and Charles Huenemann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 12 Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 7; cf. Don Garrett, “Spinoza's Necessitarianism,” in *God and Nature in Spinoza's Metaphysics*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 191–192.
- 13 Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 47.
- 14 See John Morrison, “The Relation between Conception and Causation in Spinoza's Metaphysics,” *Philosopher's Imprint* 13, no. 1 (2013): 1–17, here 3.
- 15 Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3–4.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 17 Martin Lin, *Being and Reason: An Essay on Spinoza's Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), ch. 4.
- 18 Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 77–78.
- 19 Cf. Daniel Garber, “Superheroes in the History of Philosophy: Spinoza, Super-Rationalist,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 3 (2015): 507–521, here 518. Garber calls the fact that God has the essence that he does a brute fact, which violates the Principle of Sufficient Reason that Della Rocca attributes to him. In a sense, this is correct. Della Rocca does attribute such a Principle of Sufficient Reason to Spinoza, and there could be no explanation of the fact in question. Rather than call it a brute fact, I prefer to think of it as the kind of fundamental fact for which no sensible Principle of Sufficient Reason demands an explanation, what Shamik Dasgupta calls an “autonomous fact,” in his “Metaphysical Rationalism,” *Noûs* 50, no. 2 (2016): 379–418, here 383.
- 20 E2d2.
- 21 E1p36 and E1p36d.
- 22 E3d2.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 E4p5 and E4p5d.
- 25 Bennett, *Study*, 115; Van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 150–153.
- 26 In E1p16 Spinoza says that everything that falls under an infinite intellect follows from the nature of God. An infinite intellect is unlimited (by E1d2) and

thus can conceive of every conceivable thing. In other words, if something is conceivable, then it exists. E1a2 says that everything that is not conceived through itself is conceived through another. That something is conceived entails that it is conceivable. Thus, we can infer from E1a2 that if something exists, then it is conceivable. We can combine the conditionals derived from E1p16 and E1a2 into the following biconditional: something exists just in case it is conceivable.

- 27 Michael Della Rocca, "A Rationalist Manifesto," *Philosophical Topics* 31, no. 1 (2003): 75–93, here 82–88, and Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 9.
- 28 Della Rocca, *Spinoza*, 262.
- 29 Ibid., 47; Yitzhak Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), xv.
- 30 Martial Gueroult asserts that E1p4 is equivalent to E1a1 in his *Spinoza 1: Dieu* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968), 117. But E1a1 says what exists and not what serves to distinguish the distinct things that exist.
- 31 See Leibniz A 6.4.1645/AG 32.
- 32 See Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, *Leibniz's Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 59.

# A Response: Leibniz's Principle of (Sufficient) Reason and Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles

Valérie Debuiche

With his chapter, Martin Lin means to demonstrate that Spinoza's rationalism is not as broad as some commentators, himself included but a few years ago, and, paradigmatically, Michael Della Rocca, are inclined to believe. His main argument rests upon the fact that the so-called Principle of Sufficient Reason is not the basis of the entirety of Spinoza's metaphysical doctrine. It only is used with regard to establishing the existence and the nonexistence of substances (in fact, of God) and cannot entail anything else, such as the metaphysical Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles, for instance, or Spinoza's necessitarianism. As a Leibnizian scholar, I do not intend to discuss Lin's statements on the subject of rationalistic interpretations of Spinoza. Rather, I would like to consider the way Lin appeals to Leibniz's own rationalism in order to deflate Spinoza's.

According to Lin, Spinoza's rationalism, based on the Principle of Sufficient Reason, must not be considered the strongest variant of Early Modern rationalism, because there is at least one variant of Early Modern rationalism which is stronger than Spinoza's, namely Leibniz's. Specifically, Lin claims that Leibniz puts the Principle of Sufficient Reason to a broader use than Spinoza and that, moreover, Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason entails the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles. In a way, Lin is right: Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason does only concern "facts about existence and non-existence," whereas, on the contrary, Leibniz seems to apply the Principle of Sufficient Reason to "every truth, every fact, and every event." Furthermore, in several texts, Leibniz argues that the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles derives from the Principle of Sufficient Reason. But, if we examine these two theses more carefully, we have

to admit that it is not obvious that Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason applies to "facts about non-existence" or to "negative existentials," or that the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles can be reduced to the Principle of Sufficient Reason. In some ways, Leibniz might not be Spinoza's super-rationalist alter-ego.

A first remark can be made about the name given to Spinoza's claim at E1p11d2 that "if something exists, there is a cause or reason why it exists, and if it doesn't, there is an explanation of its non-existence," which is called the "Principle of Sufficient Reason" by many commentators. The expression is originally Leibnizian and the term "sufficient" contains something more than "there is an explanation" or even "there is a cause or reason why something exists or not": it asserts that such a cause or reason is *also* all that is sufficient for such an explanation. It is not only about giving a reason for the existence of things, but also about giving the *ultimate* reason why something exists in the way it does. In Spinoza's *Ethics*, the so-called Principle of Sufficient Reason is used in the demonstration for the necessary existence of God [E1p11d2] and, as such, it deals not only with a cause or reason, but indeed with a sufficient cause, in that it has its own reason to exist in itself. Such a use of the terminology of sufficiency is totally consistent with Leibniz's one.

The issue now is to verify whether Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason does apply to non-existential facts, as Lin suggests in order to prove that it entails Spinoza's Principle of Sufficient Reason and goes beyond it. For that purpose, we need to carefully read Leibniz's references to the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Doing so, some subtle but meaningful nuances appear in Leibniz's explanations of what a principle of reason is. First, such a principle means that *nihil est sine causa*. In the 1680s, Leibniz details what he has in mind by claiming that nothing is without a cause. Among many other references, we can quote this passage from a letter Leibniz wrote to Arnauld in June 1686:

Et c'est ce qu'Aristote et l'École veulent signifier en disant: *Praedicatum inest subjecto*. C'est aussi à quoi revient cet axiome, *nihil est sine causa*, ou plutôt, *nihil est cujus non possit reddi ratio*, c'est-à-dire toute vérité de droit ou de fait, peut être prouvée a priori en faisant voir la liaison du prédicat et du sujet. Quoique le plus souvent il n'appartienne qu'à Dieu de connaître distinctement cette connexion, surtout en matières de fait, que les esprits finis ne connaissent qu'a posteriori et par expérience. Or ce que je viens de dire est à mon avis la nature de la vérité en général, ou bien je ne connais pas ce qu'est vérité. [A II.2.56]<sup>1</sup>

In another text from the same period, *De arte characteristica ad perficiendas scientias ratione nitentes* (1688), Leibniz writes:



*Duobus* utor in demonstrando *principiis*, quorum unum est: falsum esse quod implicat *contradictionem*, alterum est, omnis Veritatis (quae immediata sive identica non est) *reddi posse rationem*, hoc est notionem praedicati semper notioni sui subjecti vel expresse vel implicite inesse; idque non minus in denominationibus extrinsecis quam intrinsecis, nec minus in veritatibus contingentibus quam necessariis locum habere. [A VI.4.912]<sup>2</sup>

The important point here is that the principle is not called the principle of “sufficient reason” but is presented as the principle “of the reason to be given” [*Principium Reddendae Rationis*]. The *Principium Reddendae Rationis* refers to a principle of knowledge and reasoning. It is closely related to another principle according to which, in any true proposition, the notion of predicate is contained in the notion of subject [*praedicatum inest subjecto*].<sup>3</sup> The Principle *Praedicatum Inest Subjecto* is also the mere definition of truth. With regard to any true proposition, it is possible to give the reason for why it is true, since it suffices to show that the predicate inheres in the subject—which it always does.<sup>4</sup>

Let me briefly discuss the relation between the two principles of knowledge in Leibniz: the Principle of Contradiction and the *Principium Reddendae Rationis*. It is worth noting that the Principle of Contradiction postulates that (a proposition containing a) contradiction is always false or, equivalently, that a proposition cannot be true and false at the same time, or that, if two propositions are contradictory, one is true and the other is false. This principle is obviously valid for both necessary truths as well as for contingent ones: if one contingent proposition is true, the contradictory proposition is false. But with respect to a necessary proposition, the appeal to the *Principle of Contradiction* is sufficient to prove its truth, since the contradictory proposition of a necessary truth is impossible or, what is the same, contains a contradiction such as *Anon-A*. In other words, to prove a necessary truth, and to know it as such, it suffices to demonstrate the impossibility of its contradictory proposition by means of a finite number of steps of reasoning (in fact, by means of notional resolutions or definitions). This is not the case for contingent truths, since the contradictory proposition of a contingent truth is possible and does not contain any contradiction in itself. The analysis of such propositions must be infinite. Nonetheless, thanks to the Principle *Praedicatum Inest Subjecto*, it is always theoretically possible to show how a contingently true proposition is true by means of the analysis of its notions. This cannot fail to reveal the inherence of the predicate within the subject, even if only to God. Hence, if there is undoubtedly a reason which can be given why a necessary proposition is true, and if the *Principle of Contradiction* is not invalidated by any contingent truths, contingent truths can only be known

in virtue of the *Principium Reddendae Rationis*, which is based on the Principle *Praedicatum Inest Subjecto*:

Or c'est la même raison, qui me fait douter s'il est convenable de dire qu'un autre principe qui n'a gueres moins d'usage, que celui de la contradiction, *sçavoir que rien n'arrive sans qu'il y ait quelque raison que celui qui sçauroit tout, pourroit rendre, pourquoi il soit plustost arrivé que non*, cesse à l'égard de la liberté. D'autant plus qu'il paroist à moy que ce principe nous sert exprés dans les matieres contingentes comme celui de la contradiction nous sert dans les matieres necessaires. Et c'est pour cela que les loix du mouvement en dependent, parce [qu'elles] ne sont pas d'une necessité geometrique, leur source estant la volonté de Dieu réglée par la sagesse. Or comme le *principe de contradiction* est celui de la necessité, et le *principe de la raison à rendre* est celui de la contingence. [To Alberti, c. 1689, A II.2.300–301]<sup>5</sup>

We come now to our point. For Leibniz, the *Principium Reddendae Rationis* is also the principle of contingency or of existence: nothing happens without a reason for it happening the way it happens. This principle (of the reason to be given) becomes the principle of “sufficient” reason as soon as the issue is metaphysical and consists not in proving the truth of any contingent proposition, nor only in giving the cause of one existing or contingent thing, but in determining the reason why the existing things do exist in the way they exist and not in another possible way. Lin refers to Leibniz's *Monadologie* when arguing that Leibniz “thinks that all facts require a cause or reason”:

§31. Our reasonings are based upon *two great principles*: the first *the principle of contradiction*, by virtue of which we judge that false which involves a contradiction and that true which is opposed or contradictory to the false;

§32. And the second *the principle of sufficient reason*, by virtue of which we observe that there can be found no fact that is true or existent, or any true proposition, without there being a sufficient reason for its being so and not otherwise, although we cannot know these reasons in most cases. [GP VI 612/L 646]

The following passages are required to determine what Leibniz could think such a sufficient reason to be:

§33. There are also two kinds of truths, truths of *reasoning* and truths of *fact*. [...]

§36. But a *sufficient reason* must also be found in *contingent truths or truths of fact*, that is to say, in the sequence of things distributed through the universe of creatures, whose analysis into particular reasons could proceed into unlimited detail because of the immense variety of things in nature and the division of bodies into the infinite. [...]

§37. As all this *detail* includes other earlier or more detailed contingent factors, each of which in turn needs a similar analysis to give its reason, one makes no progress, and the sufficient or final reason will have to be outside the sequence or *series* of these detailed contingent factors, however infinite they may be.

§38. Thus the final reason of things must be in a necessary substance in which the detail of the changes can be contained only eminently, as in their source. It is the substance that we call *God*. [GP VI 612–613/L 646]

We see that, if the sufficient reason of necessary truths may be found with use of the mere *Principle of Contradiction* (by the possibility of reducing the proposition to logical identity, *A is A* or *A is not non-A* or *AB is B*, with a finite number of resolutions or definitions, or by the possibility of reducing its contradictory to antilogy, *A is not A*, *A is non-A*, *AB is not B*, *AB is non-B*), the sufficient reason of the truth of contingent propositions can only be found in an ultimate thing outside the series of contingent things and necessary in itself, that is to say in God. In that text, as in many others,<sup>6</sup> the Principle of Sufficient Reason is devoted to the demonstration of the existence of God as the only necessary being, cause of itself and of every contingent thing, which makes it a “sufficient” cause.

Accordingly, it is correct to refer here to both Spinoza’s principle as well as to the Leibnizian Principle of Sufficient Reason, since both are related to the demonstration of the existence of God as a necessary being. Nevertheless, this does not mean that, while referring to the *Principium Reddendae Rationis*, Leibniz always identifies this reason (to be given) as the sufficient one. The “reason to be given” is not necessarily God as the ultimate cause of every real effect, of any existing thing. It can also be a proximate cause, for instance the preceding state that explains the following one,<sup>7</sup> just like in mechanics one physical effect such as the change of the direction of a motion of a ball is explained through the motion of another ball striking it in a certain way. The *Principium Reddendae Rationis* states that *any truth can be proven* but a proof might sometimes not arrive at the sufficient and divine reason, when for instance it is based on the analysis of propositions (and not of notions).<sup>8</sup> For example, it can be established that *if A is B, then A is C*, without giving the final reason why A exists or why A is the way it is.

To further explain the difference between the *Principium Reddendae Rationis* and the Principle of Sufficient Reason, we may also look at Lin’s considerations with regard to the equivalence by means of which he proves that Leibniz’s Principle of Sufficient Reason also bears on non-existential facts. He notes that “every universal generalization [is] logically equivalent to a negative existential”: *all ravens are black* is logically equivalent to *there does not exist a nonblack raven*. As a consequence, Lin states that Leibniz’s Principle of Sufficient Reason

applies to “negative existentials as well.” This reasoning calls for some remarks. The first one concerns the identification of a generalized fact with a universal fact. This does not seem to be right, because of the nature of statistical truth, which only tells us that, *as far as we know*, ravens are always black but not that they are all black. Even if we ignore this point, a second remark leads us to notice that a statistical truth, such as *ravens are always black*, is not sufficient to claim that ravens are *essentially* or *necessarily* black. In other words, that *all ravens are always black* does not mean that it is impossible for a raven to be nonblack. Fortunately, Lin does not talk about possibility or impossibility, but about existence and nonexistence. But instead of resolving the difficulty, this may make it only stronger.

According to the logical expression of a universal affirmative in Leibniz's rational calculus, *if* all ravens are black, it is *then* necessary that any nonblack raven is impossible<sup>9</sup>:  $(all\ R\ is\ B) \Leftrightarrow (RB \equiv R) \Leftrightarrow (R \equiv RB) \Leftrightarrow (RnonB \equiv RBnonB) \Leftrightarrow (RnonB \equiv AnonA)$ —since  $BnonB$  is equivalent to any contradiction, it can be generally expressed as  $AnonA$ . Consequently, *if* (it is true that) all ravens are black, *then* it is impossible for a raven to be nonblack and, *therefore*, there does not exist any nonblack raven. In fact, all we might say regarding the relation between the universal affirmative proposition and the corresponding negative existential proposition depends on such a conditional statement whose reciprocal statement is problematic. Indeed, *if* there does not exist any nonblack raven, *then* (it is true that) all ravens are black, *on the condition that* the existence of a nonblack raven is impossible in itself. It must be that  $RnonB$ , or at least  $RnonBexisting$ , are equivalent to  $AnonA$ . Let me now clarify this last point.

It is quite obvious that  $RnonB$  cannot be impossible in itself: a nonblack raven is totally conceivable. For instance, we can easily imagine an albino raven. What can we say about  $RnonBexisting$ ? Does the possibility or the impossibility of such a notion depend on the analysis of its notion? In other words, is its truth or falsity knowable by means of the *Principium Reddendae Rationis*? Is “existing” a predicate contained in the subject which exists? One of the most important points of Leibniz's logic concerns the precise notations he uses and the fact that he clearly distinguishes between “being” [*ens*] and “existing” [*existens*]. *Ens* is defined as a being which is possible, which means it contains no contradiction. In that sense,  $RnonB$  is an *ens*, a being. *Existens* is defined as “what is compatible with more things than other things are incompatible with it” [*quod cum pluribus compatibile est, quam quodlibet aliud incompatibile cum ipso*] [A VI.4.744].

Leibniz will tackle the delicate issue of the predicative status of *existens* in *Generales Inquisitiones de Analysi Notionum et Veritatum* (1686), §§71–74,

which are devoted to this question [A VI.4.762–763]. Leibniz there examines the conjunction *A is B* and *A exists* (or *A is existing*), asking whether it is equivalent to *AB is existing*, that is to say whether *AB* is said to contain *existing*, or *Aexisting* is said to contain *B*, or *A* is said to contain both *B* and *existing*. His solution is that, in fact, we should say *A is B existing* (for instance, *Pierre is renouncing existing*, meaning *Pierre is actually renouncing*) each time *A* is a concrete individual. The main theoretical element of Leibniz's doctrine at play here is the distinction between *ens* and *existens*:

§73. non video quid aliud in Existente concipiatur, quam aliquis Entis gradus, quoniam variis Entibus applicari potest. Quanquam nolim dicere aliquid existere esse possibile seu Existentiam possibilem, haec enim nihil aliud est quam ipsa Essentia; nos autem Existentiam intelligimus actuaalem seu aliquid superadditum possibilitati sive Essentiae [...]. [A VI.4.762]<sup>10</sup>

In other words, even if “existing” can be predicated of a subject, it is only in the case of an individual being endowed with what Leibniz calls a “complete notion.” It does not depend on possibility, since any *ens* is as possible as any other. Rather, it requires the additional idea of “degree of being” which can be determined only through a comparison, not between possible beings, but between the degrees of their compatibility. “Existing” is the being which is compatible with the largest number of other possible beings. The complete notion, which defines Leibnizian individuals, is the one containing anything which can be truly said about the thing the notion is applied to. The notion *Caesar* contains anything that can be said about the subject it is applied to: that he was a human being, an emperor, was murdered, and so on. On the contrary, the notion *emperor* does not contain anything that can be said about the subject, Caesar, to whom it can be truly applied. *Emperor* is an incomplete notion, just like *raven* or *black* is, and it has no relation to existence. Still, the completeness of the notion of an individual does not even contain the existence predicate *unless* this individual pertains to the set of compatible things which is the largest one. And the determination of this kind of optimality (among compatible beings) is ultimately grounded in the powerful and omniscient mind pleased with such an optimality of beings. This is, of course, connected to the Principle of Sufficient Reason: the reason for the truth of contingent propositions has to be found in the proper nature of a mind endowed with all specifically divine qualities: power, intelligence, and perfection.

Nonetheless, there is no logical equivalence between “all ravens are black” and “there does not exist a nonblack raven,” because the falsity of *RnonBexisting*

does not depend on any logical reasons and its falsity is no impossibility—even if blackness were essential to ravenness. This is why it is very problematic to claim that, applying to general propositions, Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason consequently applies to non-existential facts. Besides, the Principle of Sufficient Reason founds existential propositions, but in a totally positive way: there is nothing like a choice of avoiding certain existences, such as the one of a nonblack raven. Divine choice is the choice of the greatest good or of the largest number of existing things. All that could be said about this is that this choice of the best renders impossible the actualization of other possible sets of compatible things, including the ones in which ravens were not black or Caesar would not have been murdered. But such sets remain possible in themselves and do exist in the “area of eternal truths,” that is in God's understanding.

To conclude, even if the *Principium Reddendae Rationis* can be applied to general propositions thanks to the Principle *Praedicatum Inest Subjecto*, this does not mean that such propositions are true in virtue of the Principle of Sufficient Reason. The Principle of Sufficient Reason goes further: it calls for the ultimate reason, that is for God, and it supposes another fundamental principle: the Principle of Perfection. The ultimate reason for God to choose this possible set of compatible things instead of any other one depends on the fact that this set is the best one, the most perfect, the one endowed with the highest degree of being. All the truths concerning existence are finally based on this idea that, whereas any possible thing tends to exist, it exists only if it is a part of the best, richest, most perfect whole. This leads me to the last remark I wanted to make about Lin's claim that the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles derives from the Principle of Sufficient Reason in Leibniz's doctrine.

This claim is based on a text from around 1689, *Principia logico-metaphysica* [A VI.4.1645]. In this text, Leibniz derives the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles from the Principle *Praedicatum Inest Subjecto*. Nonetheless, although it is also true that Leibniz sometimes derives the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles from the Principle of Sufficient Reason, sometimes he also derives it from the Principle of Perfection, and some other times, he considers them to be two fundamental and non-equivalent principles.<sup>11</sup> My last remark only deals with the way Lin presents Leibniz's reasoning in *Principia logico-metaphysica*. I am not sure I perfectly understand what “an identity” and a “qualitative truth” should correspond to in Leibniz's text. According to Leibniz, “identity” is not something depending on identity predicates such as *is identical to B*. Leibniz refers to identity as the fundamental logical principle which states that *A is A* and *A is not non-A*, and *if A is B, then A is not non-B*, or

if it is true that *A* is *B*, then it is false that *A* is not *B* (which corresponds to the *Principle of Contradiction*). As far as I understand it, a qualitative truth would be a proposition like *Caesar is emperor*. Martin Lin states that “the only thing that can explain an identity is a qualitative truth,” but in my opinion, it would be the contrary: “the only thing that can explain a qualitative truth is (the principle of) identity,” that is, the fact that a thing is what it is and is not what it is not, as soon as we also have the *Principle Praedicatum Inest Subjecto*.

Furthermore, the *Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles* postulates that two things which are not different are one and the same thing. Such an identity is both numerical and ontological (or essential and relative to their being). The main point of this principle is that it only applies to concrete beings endowed with a complete notion: incomplete and abstract notions are not concerned by it.<sup>12</sup> In short, it is possible for two distinct incomplete objects to have the same “qualitative” predicates, just as do two similar triangles or two points. Yet this is *impossible* for concrete individual beings, since they cannot be distinguished in one way or another without having in their own notion the reason for that difference in virtue of the completeness of their notions. Thus, as soon as two things have exactly the same properties (are indiscernible), they may differ by names, but they are identical, not only logically, but ontologically: they are *one* thing, *A* is *A*. Conversely, if apparently indiscernible concrete things are distinguished as two things, like two leaves or two drops of water, this can only be according to an intrinsic difference we are simply incapable of perceiving, knowing, or determining.

In conclusion, even if we consider Leibniz to be the philosopher of the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, it does not seem to me that his principle contains Spinoza’s idea for the “explanation” of nonexistences, since Leibniz is keen to maintain a strong distinction between possible and real, contingency and necessity, tendency to exist and actuality of existence. His means for grounding the passages of possible *ens* to *existens* in the idea of the highest degree of being, which is both best and most perfect, crystallizes the peculiarity of Leibniz’s approach to existential considerations. In this context, the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, leading to God, is something more metaphysical than the *Principium Reddendae Rationis*, which is the specific principle for explanations (*this* is Spinoza’s so-called *Principle of Sufficient Reason*), even if in some ways they are equivalent, mostly when the *Principle Praedicatum Inest Subjecto* is used. Besides, the relation of the *Principle of Sufficient Reason* to the *Principle of Perfection* also allows us to better understand how Leibniz can sometimes also consider the *Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles* as an independent principle.



## Notes

- 1 “And this is what Aristotle and the School means by saying: *Praedicatum inest subjecto*. This is the same thing meant by this axiom, *nihil est sine causa*, or, more exactly, *nihil est cujus non possit reddi ratio*, that is to say, any truth of reason or any truth of fact can be proven a priori by showing the relation of the predicate and the subject. Though most often it only belongs to God to distinctly know this connection, especially with regards to matters of fact, which finite minds only know a posteriori and by experience, nevertheless, what I have just said, in my opinion, is either the nature of truth in general, or I do not know what truth is” (our translation).
- 2 “For demonstrations, I use two principles, one being: is false what involves a *contradiction*; and the other being: it is *possible to give a reason* for every truth (which is not immediate or identical), that is, the notion of the predicate is always in the notion of the subject, either expressly or implicitly. This holds no less in case of the extrinsic denominations than in the case of intrinsic ones, no less in the case of contingent truths than in the case of the necessary ones” (our translation).
- 3 In contemporary Anglo-American Leibniz literature, PPIS (Principle *Praedicatum Inest Subjecto*) is often known as PIN (Predicate-In-Notion principle). PIN might lead us to believe that, in the case of true propositions, the predicate is in the notion without qualification. But this is odd: according to the terms of the principle, in the case of true propositions, the notion of the predicate is in the notion *of the subject*—*praedicatum inest subjecto*.
- 4 I want to thank Arnaud Lalanne for the many references he gave on this topic during his talk: “Les deux grands principes de raisonnement” (Université d’Aix-Marseille, January 13, 2018).
- 5 “Indeed, it is the same reason that makes me wonder whether it is right to say that another principle which has hardly any less usage than the one of contradiction, namely that *nothing happens without there being some reason, which whoever knew everything could render, why what happened did happen rather than not*, ceases with regard to freedom. Insofar as it seems to me that this principle especially serves us in contingent matters in the same way that the principle of contradiction serves us in necessary matters. And this is why the laws of movement depend on it, because they are not of a geometrical necessity, their source being the will of God regulated by his wisdom. The *principle of contradiction* is the one of necessity, the *principle of the reason to be given* is the one of contingency” (our translation).
- 6 For instance, from *Confessio philosophi* from 1673 [A VI.3.115–149] or *De arte characteristica ad perficiendas scientias ratione nitentes* from 1688 [A VI.4.912] to *Essais de Théodicée* from 1710 [GP VI 127, §44], *Principes de la nature et de la*



*grâce fondés en raison* from 1714 [GP VI 602, §§7–8], and the letter to Clarke from November 1715 [GP VII 355–356].

- 7 See again *De arte characteristica ad perficiendas scientias ratione nitentes* [A VI.4.912].
- 8 The idea that the analysis of propositions, by which some truth is demonstrated, is easier to carry out than the analysis of notions is frequent and can already be found in 1679, in *Introductio ad Encyclopaediam arcanam* [A VI.4.530–531]. On such matters, see the major text for Leibniz's rational calculus and logic in the 1680s: *Generales inquisitiones de analysi notionum et veritatum* from 1686 [A VI.4.739–788].
- 9 “≡” is the sign for logical coincidence.
- 10 “I do not see what else can be conceived by existing [*existens*] other than a certain degree of being [*ens*], since it can be applied to different beings. Nonetheless, by saying that something exists, I do not want to say that this is possible, i.e. a possible existence, for this [a possible existence] is nothing other than Essence itself. In effect, we conceive actual existence as something which is added to possibility or essence” (our translation).
- 11 For a very recent discussion on that topic in its *locus classicus*, the correspondence between Clarke and Leibniz, see Christian Leduc, “Indiscernables et raison suffisante dans la correspondance Leibniz-Clarke,” in *Lumières no. 29: Principia rationis: Les principes de la raison dans la pensée de Leibniz*, ed. Arnaud Lalanne (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2017), 135–150.
- 12 This is why, in his very interesting paper devoted to Leibniz's conception of space, Lin should not have applied the Principle of Identity of Indiscernibles to points, which are abstract and incomplete beings. See Martin Lin, “Leibniz on the Modal Status of Absolute Space and Time,” *Noûs* 50, no. 3 (2015): 447–464, here 457. From another point of view, it also seems problematic to me to imagine two individuals with the same intrinsic properties but with different extrinsic properties, just as Lin does in “The Principle of Sufficient Reason in Spinoza,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed. Michael Della Rocca (New York: Oxford, 2017). Indeed, extrinsic properties are only the phenomenal or material expressions of intrinsic properties, that is of the perceptive states of substances which are always conceived and created together in harmony. It is not that God “would have no reason to create the actual world rather than a world in which two indiscernible individuals were switched with respect to their extrinsic relations”; rather, the fact is that there is no reason to have different extrinsic properties without having different intrinsic properties, since intrinsic properties metaphysically ground the extrinsic ones.

## The Transformation of Relations in Spinoza's Metaphysics

Simon B. Duffy

One finds in Spinoza's *Ethics* what could be described as a double point of view of the degree of the power to act of a singular thing: sometimes it seems to be fixed to a precisely determined degree; sometimes it seems to admit a certain degree of variation. The question of how to resolve this apparent contradiction has been responsible for many varying interpretations among scholars in the field of Spinoza studies. For a more precise understanding of these different ways of variation, and to render them compatible with each other, it is necessary to commence with the question of the variation of the essences of singular things. Certain interpreters consider these essences to be situated between a "minimum" and a "maximum," and that it is only above or below this range that the rupture of an individual's identity is attained, resulting in a change of the individual's structure and therefore of its nature. Any resolution of these questions will involve an understanding of the relation between the essence of an individual human being, the conatus of that human being, and its power to act. In *Qualité et quantité dans la philosophie de Spinoza* [Quality and Quantity in Spinoza's Philosophy], Charles Ramond maintains that the essence of a singular thing is determined by a "precise rapport" of movement and rest, or by a *quantum* of the power to act of the conatus, and all variation is prohibited, since all augmentation and diminution of this power to act would create another individual. Despite this conclusion, that all augmentation and diminution of the power to act of the same individual is inconceivable, Ramond believes that it leaves man "absolutely incomprehensible, and moreover contrary to good sense."<sup>1</sup> Ramond is here

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confronted with the apparent contradiction raised by our first question, which he wants to resolve by redefining one side of the contradiction. He maintains the concept of a fixed power to act of a singular thing, while denying that there is room for the concept of a margin of variation “of” its power to act. Ramond proposes to do this by making a distinction between changes “of” the power to act and changes “in” the power to act. Ramond justifies this formulation by arguing that the “variations ‘in’ the power to act” occur within the theory of the passions, that is, the power to act itself remains unchanged by these variations within the theory of the passions. Despite the fact that Ramond provides a useful rubric to resolve the apparent contradiction, the main two interpreters that we will look at will be Pierre Macherey and Gilles Deleuze. We will examine the similarities and differences between their respective interpretations of the composition of a finite mode and how this contributes to the way each interpreter goes about resolving the apparent contradiction in the definition of a mode’s power to act.

In *Introduction à l’Ethique de Spinoza: La troisième partie* [Introduction to Spinoza’s Ethics: The Third Part], when he speaks of the *conatus* of a finite mode which constitutes its “actual essence,” Macherey writes that “the power [*puissance*] and the energy of the *conatus* of each thing invests itself by deploying itself according to the thresholds of intensity distributed between a minimum and a maximum, the first corresponding to a pole of extreme passivity, the second to a pole of extreme activity.”<sup>2</sup> When he writes “between a minimum and a maximum,” he seems to agree with Ramond’s (mis)interpretation of Gueroult, that modal essence varies between two limits. If not, Macherey at least seems to agree with the interpretation of the essence which admits a certain margin of variation of its power to act. Even Deleuze seems to be open to criticism from Ramond for the same reason when he writes that, with Spinoza, “the relation that characterizes an existing mode as a whole is endowed with a kind of elasticity”<sup>3</sup>; and that the “essences [of existing modes] or degrees of power always correspond to a limit (a maximum or minimum).”<sup>4</sup> But it remains to be seen exactly what each of these interpreters mean by a maximum and a minimum, and exactly how they implicate the modal essence, *conatus*, and power to act of singular things together with the concept of variation.

In *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression* [Spinoza and the Problem of Expression], Deleuze invites us not to “confuse” the essence of a mode et the “relation [*rapport*] in which it expresses itself”: “A modal essence expresses itself eternally in a relation,” writes Deleuze, “but we should not confuse the essence and the relation [*rapport*] in which it expresses itself.”<sup>5</sup> Contrary to this interpretation of Deleuze, Ramond considers the two to be identical. However,

for Deleuze, insofar as Spinoza defines modes as modifications of the attributes of substance, he refers only to modal essences, not to the existence of modes, which is determined solely by the effects of existing modes on each other. Therefore, within an attribute, each mode is composed of both a modal essence and, corresponding to this, an existing mode. Deleuze suggests that a modal essence can be divided into what he calls “intensive parts”; and an existing mode can be divided into what he calls “extensive parts.”<sup>6</sup> Deleuze understands by “intensive parts” those “parts of power [*puissance*], that is, of intrinsic or intensive parts, true degrees.”<sup>7</sup> Modal essences are therefore distinguished from one another as different “intensities” or “degrees of power.”

Deleuze declares that, with Spinoza, “modal essences are [...] parts of an infinite series.”<sup>8</sup> He argues that the essences of finite modes “do not form a hierarchical system in which the less powerful depend on the more powerful, but an actually infinite collection, a system of mutual implications, in which each essence conforms with all of the others, and in which all essences are involved in the production of each.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore the degree of power or essence of modes within any attribute are mutually determined by one another. Corresponding to any determined degree of power is an existing mode. Each existing mode involves its attribute precisely in the form belonging to that attribute. Existing modes can be seen as extensive parts, which are external to one another, and which act on one another from the outside. An existing finite mode comes to exist by virtue of an external cause; its cause is another existing finite mode, whose own cause is another existing mode, and so on *ad infinitum*. The component parts of an existing mode are external to the mode’s essence but these extensive parts exist directly in relation to the modes intensive parts, that is, to its essence or degree of power. Therefore, insofar as a mode exists, an infinity of extensive parts pertain to it under the relation that corresponds to its essence. “To every degree of intensity, however small, there correspond an infinity of extensive parts [...] even to a minimal essence there correspond an infinity of parts.”<sup>10</sup> The primary elements of Spinoza’s scheme, according to Deleuze, are therefore a mode’s essence, which is a degree of power, and, corresponding to this a mode’s power of existence, which it possesses in relation to the extensive parts of which it is composed.

Deleuze argues that with Spinoza, the relations between the extensive parts which constitute the existence of a mode or body, and which correspond to that mode’s essence, are determined by purely mechanical laws. Such a mode comes to exist when an infinity of extensive parts enter into a “given” relation [*rapport*] which corresponds to a given modal essence, when its parts “actually belong to

it ... *in a certain relation [rapport] of movement and rest.*"<sup>11</sup> Deleuze refers to this relation as "a characteristic relation [*rapport*]." <sup>12</sup> This mode continues to exist as long as the ratio or proportion of relations and relative movement of the extensive parts is maintained. By arguing in this way, Deleuze suggests that the form of an existing body will not change if its component parts are at each moment renewed according to the "characteristic" relation of movement and rest. The whole remains the same insofar as it is composed of the same ratio or proportion of parts that articulate that particular modal essence. An existing body is thus open to continual alteration of motion and rest between its parts, but it will continue to exist as long as the same ratio or proportion of parts subsists in the whole.<sup>13</sup> "Each mode endures," writes Deleuze, "as long as its parts remain in the relation [*rapport*] that characterizes it."<sup>14</sup>

According to these mechanical laws, Deleuze's concept of a singular thing or composite body can be articulated in the following way. A composite body is what constitutes a whole present in its parts. Such a body is characterized by the relation that is formed between an infinity of extensive parts and the modal essence to which this relation corresponds. The essence or degree of power of an existing composite body articulates itself in a relation which subsumes an infinity of extensive parts. These parts are determined to enter into the characteristic relation, or to realize this relation, through the operation of an external determinism. The extensive parts that enter into a relation must have existed in other relations. These initial relations have to combine if the extensive parts subsumed are to enter into the new composite relation. If the extensive parts combine to form some other relation, they will form part of another whole. These extensive parts will then correspond to another modal essence, and therefore compose the existence of another mode or body.

For Deleuze, the modal identity of such a complex composite body, or the extent to which it corresponds to the same modal essence, is associated with the spatial and dynamic pattern of composition and the function in which the composite body consists, i.e., its identity is not solely bound to the relations between the simpler bodies of which it is composed as Ramond holds. The preservation of identity through time rests not only with the preservation of the pattern rather than with the particular collection of parts presently embodying it, but for any body, its "identity," or its remaining "itself," should be explained both by some constant proportion or ratio of parts, "and" on it remaining a part of a larger more composite whole. As Deleuze writes: "We should not confuse the essence and the relation [*rapport*] in which it expresses itself."<sup>15</sup> The modal identity of a body is thus seen in the sustained sequence of states of a unified

plurality, with only the form of its union enduring while the parts come and go. This is the concept of the individual as a determinate level of “integration,” or individuation, which, as a whole, incorporates other individuals, and is itself incorporated as a part into, and therefore composing, more composite, although not necessarily more complex, individuals or bodies.<sup>16</sup>

By explaining the mechanical determination of a mode's existence, Deleuze has argued, as we have seen, that a mode's essence is a degree of power to which corresponds a certain capacity of the mode's extensive parts to be affected by other extensive parts. This is illustrated in the relations between the extensive parts of a human Body and those of other existing modes or individuals. Deleuze notes that Spinoza differentiates the motion and rest of the extensive parts composing a human Body insofar as “some of the individuals of which the human Body is composed are fluid, some soft, and others, finally, are hard.”<sup>17</sup> Those bodies “whose parts lie upon one another over a large surface” and whose position is therefore difficult to change, Spinoza calls “hard”; those bodies “whose parts lie upon one another over a small surface” and whose position can be changed with less difficulty, Spinoza calls “soft”; and those whose parts are in motion, Spinoza calls “fluid.”<sup>18</sup> Spinoza goes on to describe what happens when these different parts of the human Body interact with an external body. He says that “when a fluid part of the human Body is determined by an external body so that it frequently thrusts against a soft part of the body, it changes its surface and, as it were, impresses on the soft part certain traces of the external body striking against the fluid part.”<sup>19</sup> Such a determination by an external body is what Spinoza understands to be an “affection” of the human Body—the way in which the human Body is affected by other bodies. Deleuze argues that if an individual is able to undergo such affections without them changing the proportion or ratio of its parts—i.e., without its relations being destroyed or decomposed by them—then this capacity to be affected which belongs to that individual is an expression of its power of existing. Insofar as a body is an individual or human being whose structure is constituted by the composition of its relations, these relations are inseparable from that individual's capacity to be affected. Deleuze argues that an affection in Spinozian terminology may be active or passive, depending on whether the affection was determined by the mode's own degree of power, or whether it was acted upon from without by an external body. Therefore, the power of existing of a mode always corresponds to a power to be affected, and this power or capacity to be affected is always exercised, either in affections produced by external things or in affections explained by its own essence. Those affections produced by external things are called passive affections, and those

explained by the mode's own essence are called active affections. Deleuze argues that to the extent that an individual's affections can be explained by passive affections, it is said to suffer, or undergo things, and its power of existence is expressed by a power of suffering. To the extent that an individual's affections can be explained by active affections, it is said to act, and its power of existence is expressed by a power of acting.

Deleuze writes that the "capacity to be affected remains constant, whatever the proportion of active and passive affections."<sup>20</sup> However, Deleuze argues that within this fixed capacity of being affected the proportion of active and passive affections is open to variation. "For a given essence, for a given capacity to be affected, the power of suffering and that of acting should be open to variation in inverse proportion one to the other. Both together, in their varying proportions, constitute the capacity to be affected."<sup>21</sup> The production of active affections will have as a result the corresponding reduction of passive affections, and, reciprocally, the continuation of passive affections will inhibit proportionally the power to act. Thus for Deleuze, the power to act of an essence is open to variation.

Macherey bases his argument on the foundation that the conatus of a finite mode constitutes its "actual essence." According to Macherey, neither the conatus nor the power to act of a finite mode is variable. Macherey considers the concept of a variation to be a problem of logic, which is resolved by what Macherey considers to be "an economic perspective on the system of affective life [*la vie affective*] as a whole."<sup>22</sup> Macherey argues that it is throughout affective life that the capacity [*puissance*] of the conatus deploys itself between the poles of extreme passivity and activity. Affective life is constituted in one part by the Spinozist theory of the passions. Macherey explains what he means by affect in the following way: "It is the idea of an affection of the body which corresponds to an augmentation or diminution of its power to act: or this variation is in relation [*rapport*] with the fact that the body is affected, sometimes by itself, sometimes by an external body."<sup>23</sup> That is to say, the body is affected sometimes by itself resulting in the idea of an augmentation of its power to act, sometimes by an external body resulting in the idea of a diminution of its power to act. In the general definition of the affects, Spinoza notes 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."<sup>24</sup> Macherey argues that this idea expresses only "a momentary state of our body [...] in rupture with [its]

preceding state”<sup>25</sup> in the sense of an augmentation or diminution, which marks a development or a restriction, of its power to act. As Spinoza says, all affectivity is based on the foundation of “joy” and “sadness” which, according to Macherey, expresses the “transformations” [*mutationes*] associated with the fact that the soul is without end exposed to “passing sometimes to a greater sometimes to a lesser perfection.” These transformations, or “passages” [*transitiones*], are experienced as “passions,” at the heart of which the “soul,” Macherey writes, “is completely subject to the mechanisms of the imagination.”<sup>26</sup> The fact of passing to a greater perfection leaves the soul “euphoric,”<sup>27</sup> however, Macherey emphasizes that even though this “joy” that the soul experiences is perfectly real, the base on which it rests remains imaginary.

The idea of perfection of a mode of which Spinoza speaks is a measure of the power to act which is expressed actively by this mode at any precise moment. In agreement Ramond’s notion of a fixed essence and power to act, Macherey suggests that whatever the margin of variation that affects the expression of the capacity [*puissance*] of the soul, this capacity “remains in all cases, and by definition, the same,”<sup>28</sup> and, the soul “maintains this conformity to its nature without which it would simply cease to be.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, to pass to a greater perfection is to express “actively” a greater proportion of what is a mode’s fixed power to act. Passing to a lesser perfection is neither to be deprived of a greater perfection, in the sense of a hole or lack, nor “a pause in the pursuit of the movement which effects the fundamental impetus of the *conatus*.”<sup>30</sup> Sadness is the inverse of joy, but it is not the absence of joy. As Macherey writes, sadness is “a contraction of the power to think of the soul, which deprives it momentarily, but which would be unthinkable without the persistence of this power, of which it continues to give a paradoxical expression.”<sup>31</sup> Sadness therefore is an integral part of the movement of the *conatus*. What Macherey wants to make understandable by reasoning in this way is that, whatever the orientation of the variation which affects the soul, joy or sadness, the soul continues in all cases to be animated by the pressure of the *conatus*, and the “transformations” that the soul does not cease to experience, in no way alter the constancy of the *conatus*, which is, writes Macherey, “constitutionally inalterable, and persists imperturbably across these series of transitory states.”<sup>32</sup> In postulating that the soul can be confronted at any moment by the alternative between two orientations of the contrary sense, Macherey wants to make us understand that there is no room to think that the soul “would have more control of itself when it is occupied by those sentiments which elate it than when it is occupied by those sentiments which depress it.”<sup>33</sup> The character of the “transformations” therefore leaves the affections



“fundamentally ambiguous.”<sup>34</sup> As none of these states of the soul have in itself a guarantee of stability, affective life is a “state of permanent instability.”<sup>35</sup> This state, Macherey suggests, prevails in the “uninterrupted affective flux [*le flux affectif ininterrompu*], which balances continuously between the two extreme poles of a maximum and a minimum.”<sup>36</sup> Macherey concludes that the states of activity and passivity of the soul are not absolute states, and as such radically exclusive one of the other: but they are measured one against the other at the interior of a gradual series of states, that Macherey describes as the “uninterrupted affective flux [*le flux affectif ininterrompu*],” which tends to realize all intermediate forms between the two extremes. The variations of the intensity of the active expression of the power to act are therefore in rapport with the place occupied respectively by the “uninterrupted affective flux.”

It is here that Macherey introduces the concept of negativity into his interpretation of the constitution of a singular thing. Since we can never escape the “uninterrupted affective flux,” Macherey argues that “there is in our nature ... something incomplete and unfinished which is the mark of our impotence, that is, of the limited and finite character of our power [*puissance*], which is always exposed to being measured against other powers [*puissances*] which exceed and oppose us negatively.”<sup>37</sup> Macherey considers that Spinoza develops the notion of power [*puissance*] “to understand the way in which the representation of unaccomplished virtualities, which would traverse this power [*puissance*] as a sort of internal negativity, are definitively excluded from one’s field.”<sup>38</sup> The “unaccomplished virtualities” are the imaginary ideas which correspond to the “uninterrupted affective flux,” and function as a sort of internal negativity only insofar as they function to inhibit or limit the power to act of a singular thing. But actually, as we have seen, the affects of the “uninterrupted affective flux” flow from relations with external bodies, this negativity in fact therefore derives from outside of the mode. As Macherey writes: “Reality can only be connoted negatively on the plan of its extrinsic relations, not in that which concerns its intrinsic constitution.”<sup>39</sup> To confuse this negativity as something fundamental to singular things, “as if it actually constituted their cause or origin,”<sup>40</sup> one would be mistaken. The negativity of singular things does not fundamentally define them. Macherey writes that “it is in reference to this point of view that Hegel could say ... that Spinoza ‘did not give justice to the negative.’”<sup>41</sup> Spinoza’s negativity is something fundamentally extrinsic to the nature of things. Negation passes occasionally between things, as the affections of modes which are limited reciprocally, but it does pass actually in the things themselves. It cannot in any case be determined from the interior. From this point of view, the reference that

Macherey made to an internal “negation” is immediately relativized. It manifests itself in the nature of things across passive affections, but it comes from the exterior. This negativity draws the “uninterrupted affective flux” of a mode to the minimum side of the affirmation of its power [*puissance*], while the power to act is only actively expressed when the “uninterrupted affective flux” brings its power back, on the contrary, toward the maximum.

Macherey analyses affectivity from the perspective of the imagination, in relation to the attribute of thought or the soul, while Deleuze’s explication remains directly within the perspective of the body, and its power to act. Macherey considers that the effect of individual affects, whether joy or sadness, remain fundamentally ambiguous, absorbed within the “uninterrupted affective flux,” which functions as a hindrance or limit to the expression of the fixed power to act.<sup>42</sup> Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza complicates some aspects of Macherey’s reading. First of all, Deleuze wants to introduce another level of possible variation. Even though we have seen Deleuze argue that the capacity to be affected for a “given” mode is fixed, he argues, simultaneously, that it does not remain fixed at all times and from all viewpoints. “Spinoza suggests,” Deleuze maintains, “that the relation that characterizes an existing mode as a whole is endowed with a kind of elasticity.”<sup>43</sup> In opposition to the interpretation of Ramond, Deleuze maintains that a mode changes its body or relation [*rapport*] in leaving behind childhood, or on entering old age, and also after the permanent effects of illness.<sup>44</sup> Such changes as growth, aging, and illness may be understood as though the capacity to be affected and the corresponding relations enjoy “a margin, a limit within which they take form and are deformed.”<sup>45</sup> What Deleuze means by this is that, even though quantitatively there has been a change in the intensive parts of a modal essence, that is if there is a change in its intensity or degree of power, qualitatively the modal essence of this individual remains the same, and therefore is the same individual, only with an altered degree of power.<sup>46</sup>

Deleuze argues that the power of suffering and the power of acting of an existing finite mode can only be considered as two distinct principles, inversely proportional to each other within a “given,” or fixed, capacity to be affected, insofar as “we consider affections abstractly, without concretely considering the essence of the affected mode.”<sup>47</sup> Macherey’s “uninterrupted affective flux” remains abstract in the sense that Deleuze maintains here. Deleuze argues that this is a primary thesis of Spinoza, and that “this thesis, if physically true, is not metaphysically true.”<sup>48</sup> Deleuze argues that, for Spinoza, the power of suffering expresses nothing positive or real. “In every passive affection there is something

imaginary which inhibits it from being real,”<sup>49</sup> that is, which inhibits it from being real for the finite existing mode itself. As have seen, Macherey is in agreement on this point with Deleuze. When Spinoza writes in E3gendefaff 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,” Macherey argues that the affection that the soul experiences is perfectly real, but the bases upon which they rest are imaginary. However, as we will see, Deleuze develops this idea differently to Macherey.

Deleuze’s argument hinges on what he describes as “a coincidence in the development” of the respective philosophies of Leibniz and of Spinoza, in relation to the theory of the affections, that is, the concept of action and passion, a coincidence that Deleuze considers as “more remarkable” than an influence.<sup>50</sup> The coincidence that Deleuze finds between their respective terminologies is the most crucial aspect of the argument, the Leibnizian pre-Newtonian concept of “force” appearing as “coincident” with the concept of “power to act” of Spinoza. Deleuze presents the findings of Leibniz as follows: “Only active force is strictly real, positive and affirmative. Passive force [...] expresses nothing but [...] the mere limitation of active force. There would be no such force without the active force that it limits.”<sup>51</sup> This is then transposed onto Spinoza as: “Our force of suffering is simply [...] the limitation of our force of acting itself. Our force of suffering *asserts* nothing, because it *expresses* nothing at all: it ‘involves’ only [...] the limitation of our power of action.”<sup>52</sup>

The way in which “affections” in general, or the “uninterrupted affective flux,” hinder or “limit” the expression of a modes power to act is, according to Macherey, very different from the way passive affections “limit” the expression of active affections, according to Deleuze. For Macherey, the term “limit” functions to explain the impact of the affections in general on an existing mode, limiting the active expression of a finite modes power to act to the range of variation between a maximum and a minimum. Whereas for Deleuze, the term “limit” defines a margin or threshold beyond which a mode’s capacity to be affected ceases to be animated by active affections and therefore ceases altogether to be expressed, that is to say, beyond which an existing finite mode ceases to exist.

Ramond criticizes Deleuze for using the term “limit” in the singular (“*a* limit,” writes Deleuze, “*a* margin”) “since what is actually designated are two limits (‘a maximum *and* a minimum’),” Ramond argues, “or two margins, ‘between which,’ Deleuze should have written, and not ... ‘in which’ the bodies ‘take form and are deformed.’”<sup>53</sup> This criticism underlies the difference between the two concepts of “limit” that are used by Macherey and Deleuze, respectively. Macherey considers

there to be two limits, a maximum and a minimum. According to him, the active expression of a mode's power to act is hindered by the "uninterrupted affective flux" to vary within these finite limits. Whereas Deleuze uses the term "limit" in the singular to define a point beyond which an existing mode finite ceases to exist.

How can Deleuze speak of a limit in the singular when he also speaks of a maximum and a minimum, as does Macherey?<sup>54</sup> Deleuze argues that it is only in the "physical view" that the capacity to be affected remains fixed for a given essence, and can therefore be represented by a fixed range of variation between a maximum and a minimum. Macherey's point of view of modal existence fits this description. But Deleuze introduces another point of view which he calls the "ethical view," in which the capacity to be affected of a mode "is fixed only within general limits."<sup>55</sup> What Deleuze means by "within general limits" and why these are different to "the limit" he speaks of in the singular remains to be seen, however, before doing so, it is necessary to elaborate Deleuze's "ethical view."

One of the fundamental aspects of Deleuze's distinction between the physical and ethical views is the division of passive affections into, on the one hand, joyful passive affections and, on the other, sad passive affections. In the ethical view, passive affections function solely as a limit to the existence of the mode. They no longer animate modal essence, as all passive affections do with Macherey, but actually limit its expression. What changes from the physical view is the definition of the capacity to be affected of a mode, which was previously understood to be the combination of the power to suffer and the power to act of a mode. In the ethical view, the power to suffer is no longer considered to express the capacity to be affected. Deleuze describes the effect of the passive affections on the capacity to be affected in the following manner: "While exercised by passive affections, it is reduced to a minimum; we then remain imperfect and impotent, cut off, in a way, from our essence or our degree of power, cut off from what we can do."<sup>56</sup> The passive affections which have contributed to a mode's power of suffering in the physical view now only reduce or limit a mode's power to act to its "lowest degree."<sup>57</sup> Insofar as active affections contribute to a mode's power to act, they are the only affections which exercise this new ethical concept of its capacity to be affected. "The power of action is, on its own," Deleuze argues, "the same as the capacity to be affected as a whole," and this newly defined power to act, "by itself, expresses essence."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, in the ethical view, an existing mode's essence is expressed by its power to act, and its power to act is the same as its capacity to be affected.

When Deleuze says that *conatus* is the affirmation of essence in a mode's existence, he means that the essence of a mode is determined as *conatus* insofar as it exists. As we have seen, a mode exists for Deleuze insofar as it has a capacity

to be affected, where the capacity to be affected is determined by the precise relations between the extensive parts of which it is composed, the proportion or ration of which, at any given time, is fixed. According to the ethical view, the conatus of a finite mode is the “effort to maintain the body’s ability to be affected in a great number of ways,”<sup>59</sup> therefore conatus expresses a mode’s capacity to be affected. Deleuze also argues that power to act is the direct expression of the mode’s capacity to be affected, where a mode’s power to act is the measure of the relation between the intensive parts which constitute a mode’s essence, or degree of power, insofar as this is expressed as the mode’s existence. The conatus of a mode thus expresses its capacity to be affected as its power to act. From this Deleuze is able to conclude that “the variations of *conatus* as it is determined by this or that affection are the dynamic variations of our power of action.”<sup>60</sup> The *conatus* of a mode therefore varies with the corresponding variations of its capacity to be affected and its power to act.

Deleuze’s concept of a finite mode’s capacity to be affected, as we have seen, always already involves a concept of variable power to act as the expression of a mode’s active power of existence. This arrangement is complicated further in the ethical view, when Deleuze directly equates the capacity to be affected with the mode’s power to act. Passive affections, for Deleuze, now function as a limit of the expression of active affections, and therefore of the existence of the finite mode itself. This limit functions within the range of the given finite modes’ fixed power of existence, or essence,<sup>61</sup> and therefore within a maximum and a minimum. Therefore, for Deleuze, the three aspects of a mode, its capacity to be affected which is expressed by its conatus as its power to act, are all together correspondingly open to variation within this range, and their expression is limited by the passive affections that they are together subject to. However, Deleuze argues that a maximum and a minimum, or the range of variation, established by our power of existence function only as “general limits,” because finite modes are also open to a third type of change, what he calls “metaphysical” changes, which are changes of the so-called “fixed” essence itself, or power of existence. Deleuze argues that “while a mode exists, its very essence is open to variation, according to affections that belong to it at a given moment.”<sup>62</sup> These metaphysical changes to a mode’s essence are the changes which Deleuze describes as “a kind of elasticity.”<sup>63</sup> As we noted previously, Deleuze argues that essence is only fixed qualitatively and remains open to variation under certain conditions quantitatively, insofar as it is composed of “intensive parts.” Therefore, the reason that the maximum and minimum are described as “general limits” is that Deleuze uses the term “limit” in the singular, which indicates that a finite

mode is not so much limited between a maximum and a minimum, than by the actual passive affections which directly limit its existence.

Macherey and Deleuze therefore come to different conclusions concerning the resolution of the apparent contradiction between the double point of view of the essence of finite modes. According to Macherey, this contradiction dissipate itself as soon as we take into account the fact that the two theses in question are not situated on the same plane. He considers the concept of the margin of variation of a mode's power to act to be a problem of logic, which is resolved by taking an economic perspective on the system of affective life as a whole. Macherey argues that when Spinoza characterizes the elementary forms of affectivity in the unfolding of affective life, they happen to be imaginary ideas of the power to act. It is these imaginary ideas which determine a mode's power to act to vary between two alternate poles of activity and passivity, a maximum and a minimum. Affective life is constituted by these ideas which are expressed as an "uninterrupted affective flux." Macherey argues that affective life is in fact separated from a mode's power to act itself. The ideas of augmentation and diminution of the power to act associated with this life remain at the level of the imagination, while the essence, conatus, and power to act of a mode are fixed once and for all.

Deleuze views the problem differently, he considers it to be determined by two different perspectives within the *Ethics*: a physical view and an ethical view. Deleuze agrees with Macherey and Ramond in regards to the perspective of the physical view. But the differences in their respective interpretations revolve around their different interpretations of the role of the passive affections. For Macherey, they remain an integral part of the mode's existence, being expressed by the conatus of a mode although hindering its ability to express fully, or more perfectly, its fixed power to act. Deleuze's ethical view serves to resolve the apparent contradiction in another way. One of the fundamental aspects of the distinction between the physical view and the ethical view is, for Deleuze, a change in perspective on the relation between passive affections and active affections. In the ethical view, only active affections function integrally as a part of modal existence, constituting its power to act. Passive affections function rather as a limit to the existence of a mode, to the expression of its power to act, and therefore to its conatus, which both vary with the modes capacity to be affected. By admitting the variability of a mode's capacity to be affected, of its conatus and of its power to act, while maintaining the concept of its fixed modal essence, Deleuze's ethical view resolves the apparent contradiction; in fact, according to the ethical view there is no apparent contradiction.

## Notes

- 1 Charles Ramond, *Qualité et quantité dans la philosophie de Spinoza* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 194. All translations of this text are ours.
- 2 Pierre Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza, tome 3: La vie affective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 24. All translations of this text are ours.
- 3 Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone, 1992), 222.
- 4 Ibid., 204.
- 5 Ibid., 191.
- 6 Ibid., 174.
- 7 Ibid., 173.
- 8 Ibid., 198.
- 9 Ibid., 184.
- 10 Ibid., 207.
- 11 Ibid., 208.
- 12 Ibid., 209.
- 13 E2p13le4–7.
- 14 Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 213.
- 15 Ibid., 209.
- 16 Matheron discusses how the human being is more complex though less composite than a political society: “There are [...] individuals that are very integrated yet not very complex. For example, a stone: nearly all that happens in it concerns its structure, but nearly nothing happens to it; its essence is therefore very poor [pauvre]. Inversely, there are individuals that are very complex yet not very integrated. For example, a political society: lots of things happen to it, it’s possibility of internal variation assure it of a great chance of survival; but the majority of these variations (private life, loves and personal hatreds, etc.: all things indifferent to the eyes of the law) do not in any way concern its structure; and this is why it’s essence is very much less perfect than that of man, even though it has a higher degree of composition. Then again, there are individuals that are both very integrated and very complex: man, in particular, whose essence, for this reason, is extremely rich.” Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969), 58 (my translation). In the Letters to Boyle [Eps. 6, 11, 13, and 16], Spinoza expresses his doubts concerning the mechanist explanation of phenomena, which supposes the hierarchy from simple to complex, or the idea of a hierarchy of complexity based upon a hierarchy of composition.
- 17 E2ppo2.
- 18 E2pa3”.
- 19 E2ppo5.

- 20 Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 222.
- 21 Ibid., 222.
- 22 Ibid., 224.
- 23 Ibid., 355.
- 24 E3gendefaff, translated from Macherey, *Introduction*, 357.
- 25 Ibid., 355.
- 26 Ibid., 121.
- 27 Ibid., 333.
- 28 Ibid., 125.
- 29 Ibid., 123.
- 30 Ibid., 124.
- 31 Ibid., 125.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid., 121.
- 34 Ibid., 125.
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Ibid., 121.
- 37 Ibid., 70.
- 38 Ibid., 36.
- 39 Ibid., 125n.
- 40 Ibid., 73.
- 41 Ibid., 73n. For Hegel, one finds negativity at the foundation of things themselves.
- 42 Macherey bases his conception of the functioning of the “uninterrupted affective flux” on E3p17, where Spinoza speaks of *fluctuatio animi*. He argues that Spinoza chose to expose the theme of affective ambivalence [*fluctuatio animi*], with the case where a sadness doubles itself as a joy. “Let’s return to the wording of E3p17: it starts by presenting an affect of sadness ordinarily attached to an object, and if we understand this well, it is in this case that the object is cause ‘in itself’ of the ‘affect’; it then shows how, by contamination, because the object in question appears to resemble another object which ordinarily gives joy, this joy is artificially transferred onto the first object, which is then the cause ‘by accident’ of this affect of which the second object would be itself the cause ‘in itself’. The first affect proceeds from a direct association while the second proceeds from an indirect association by transfer, by which the object on which the affect is fixed is considered analogically, as representing another, and not itself” (Macherey, *Introduction*, 163).
- 43 Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 222.
- 44 E4p39s: “Sometimes a man undergoes such changes that I should hardly have said he was the same man. I have heard stories, for example, of a Spanish Poet [...] If this seems incredible, what shall we say of infants? A man of advanced years believes their nature to be so different from his own that he could not be persuaded



that he was ever an infant, if he did not make this conjecture concerning himself from [NS: the example of] others.” See Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 222.

45 Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 223.

46 We are not in a position here to take a critical perspective of Deleuze’s interpretation of Spinoza. Such a perspective, as we have already seen, would require a thorough discussion of the distinction between quantity and quality as it appears in *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, which is beyond the confines of this chapter. For the moment what we are interested in doing is setting out as clearly as possible the two different readings of Spinoza that are elaborated by Macherey and Deleuze. Unfortunately, to articulate the distinctions that Deleuze makes in relation to modal essence requires a temporary and somewhat unsatisfactory trespass onto the territory of the quantity/quality distinction.

47 Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 223.

48 Ibid., 224.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 223.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., 224.

53 Ramond, *Qualité*, 226.

54 As we have already seen in the following: “Essences [of existing modes] or degrees of power always correspond to a limit (a maximum or minimum).” Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 204.

55 Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 225.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid., 224.

58 Ibid., 225.

59 Ibid., 230.

60 Ibid., 231.

61 That is to say quantitative essence, as intensity or degree of power.

62 Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 226.

63 Ibid., 222.

# A Response: Essence, Variations in Power, and “Becoming Other” in Spinoza

Céline Hervet

Simon Duffy’s paper, “*The Transformation of Relations in Spinoza’s Metaphysics*,” illustrates not only the results of an encounter between two interpretative traditions, but also how Spinoza’s body of work has allowed for various repetitions, transmissions, and hybridizations on both sides of the Atlantic. This follows in the wake of a fastidious translation project he has undertaken over the course of recent years.<sup>1</sup> Such undertakings give us a larger and richer sense for trends in European Spinoza scholarship.

In his chapter, Duffy returns to a classic interpretative problem that a number of French commentators, such as Gilles Deleuze, Pierre Macherey, and more recently Charles Ramond, have confronted. The problem involves both an ambiguity and a hesitation: What is the place or status of variation in Spinoza’s ontology? On the one hand, affects are transitory; on the other hand, essences are immutable and individual. The essence of a thing allows for the thing to “hold,” as it were, conserving both its form and structure. Spinoza certainly does not formulate the problem in these terms; nevertheless, the *sub specie aeternitatis* point of view that is adopted by Spinoza in the *Ethics*—the essence of a singular thing corresponding both to what it is as well as what it will become—may be seen as evacuating any possibility of change, gradation, or variation. Notwithstanding this, the affects present us with the moving spectacle of incessant modifications, modifications that any thing experiences insofar as any thing is in relation with some other thing. The concept itself of affection [*affectio*] also bears witness to the fact that any singular thing is a modification of substance. Spinoza’s own notion of a mode’s essence, which from the scholastic point of view appears

perfectly contradictory, can only be understood if we admit that essences are endowed with power.<sup>2</sup> We can say, therefore, that each thing's actual essence corresponds to that portion of the divine power that is attributed to that thing. It remains to be seen what exactly such portions of divine power actually are and how they make themselves manifest in space and over time. Understanding their expression as quantities reveals itself to be the key to resolving the problem.

Part 3 of the *Ethics*, and the introduction of the concept of the *conatus*, signal what appears to be a paradigm shift with respect to Part 1. In Part 1, the essence of singular things is comprehended in light of the eternal and infinite production of substance. However, Part 1, *de Deo*, is not self-sufficient, nor can it be divorced from the geometrical order it inaugurates. For Spinoza, metaphysics is not an end in itself; rather, it is subordinated in its articulation to the deployment of an ethical theory, wherein precisely we find variation, fluctuation, passages in degrees of power, all of which, in fact, the beginning of the *Ethics* prefigured. If *substance* is determined by its affections, it is essential to know how such affections come to be, and to know what each thing is, as well as what it becomes. If *substance's* modifications are understood from the point of view of eternity, our mental and our affective lives can only be understood as "a lived experience of duration,"<sup>3</sup> which is already implied by the concepts of *conatus* and the power of acting, both of which imply that the existence of a singular thing is marked by the presence of a quantitative dimension.

Much ink has been spilled, and rightly so, about the abundance of terms that can be seen as more or less related to the term *quantum* and to a lexicon of quantity in general. It is less clear whether scholars have sufficiently measured the impact of this vocabulary on the system's coherence and comprehensibility. In effect, it is not self-evident by any means how an individual's or singular thing's essence or nature is meant to be understood within the terms set by a philosophy of power, according to which quantitative measurements are to be had, yet modes are the necessary product of an infinite and eternal substance. How can substantial unity yield the singularity of infinite modes and their endless change and variation?<sup>4</sup> At the point when the distinction between power and act is effaced, when every thing is always that which it could be, when reality and perfection mean the same thing, and when every essence is actual and correlated to a degree of acting and of passivity, it becomes necessary to rethink these variations, and to ask ourselves if they are modifications of an essence, and if not, in what manner they circumscribe it.

Duffy aims to resolve these issues. Relating with precision the major steps of the relevant French Spinozist literature, he proceeds with much subtlety to compose a pluralistic account of the question, bringing into dialogue Deleuze, Macherey, and Ramond. He looks over forty years of Spinoza research in France

and confronts the challenge posed by what, following Duffy, we may be tempted to call "an apparent contradiction in Spinozism." Ultimately, according to Duffy, this apparent contradiction turns out to be grounded in a difference in frameworks or "plans" (as Deleuze would say): the physical vs. the ethical. If no variation is conceivable on the physical "plan," the ethical "plan," the "plan" of affects and passions, is dynamic and rich in variations.

In order to create a real dialogue among commentators, Duffy adopts a relatively simple method that consists in decomposing the problem into its three elements (essence, power of acting, and the *conatus*) and allowing these to be developed following the different commentators. Ramond's work spurs Duffy on in formulating the principal terms of this alleged "apparent contradiction." In his 1995 *Quality and Quantity in Spinoza's Philosophy*, Ramond maintains that Spinoza adopts a double perspective on the nature of things as a means of ridding himself of the occult qualities that plagued Cartesian metaphysics. According to Ramond, Spinoza adopts a qualitative approach when discussing substance and its attributes understood as *Natura naturans* and he adopts a quantitative approach when discussing modes qua expressions of substance and its attributes, that is to say *Natura naturata*. These two perspectives are tightly interwoven throughout the system, Spinoza never entirely abandoning one in favor of the other. Invariably, this leads to difficulties, and what is, according to Ramond, an "incomprehensible" anthropology. Pace Ramond, Duffy rejects such a conclusion. He calls on other commentators, beginning with Deleuze, and in particular his treatment of the essence of modes of bodies, before turning to Macherey, in his effort to resolve the tension between the two perspectives. One point of contention that Duffy taps into concerns the variability of the body in its exchanges with other bodies, and the fact that these exchanges and this intercourse are built on a subsisting structural unity of bodily parts.<sup>5</sup> Macherey, in his commentary on *Ethics* Part 3, recognizes the ethical dimension of the system as especially meaningful if we are to understand the nature of the body and its variability. If there very well can be an augmentation or diminution of the power of acting of a given singular thing over the course of a thing's existence (as Spinoza presumably would like to maintain, granted his theory of the affects and the polarity of joy and sadness), and if any thing's mutations are sustained by the "uninterrupted affective flux"<sup>6</sup> to which any thing must be subject, must we conclude that the thing's essence changes over time as well?

At the very least, Deleuze, Macherey, and Ramond seem to agree on the following: a singular thing's essence remains unaltered, though its power of acting is variable. This inalterability is maintained on multiple occasions by Spinoza, for example at

E4Pref, where Spinoza specifies what he understands by a thing's passing to a greater perfection, namely, not that it exchanges its essence for another essence, but rather that its power of acting increases.<sup>7</sup> A thing's nature is conceived in this manner as situated within the limits set by a minimum and a maximum of power and as enjoying the possibility of passing between these two limit-states. This definition of essence is formulated in terms of a thing's effort, intensity, or tendency, which spontaneously becomes gradual or quantitative, thereby implying its assimilation to the *conatus*. Recall that at E3p6, Spinoza writes that "each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being." At E3p6d, furthermore, Spinoza maintains that a thing cannot be destroyed but by something external to it. Recall also the terms of E3p7, where Spinoza substitutes the term actual essence for essence *tout court*: "The striving by which each things strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing." Likewise, the demonstration of E3p7 establishes an equivalency between power, *conatus*, and the actual essence of singular things. In other words, the essence of modes, described in quantitative terms, is itself a variable something. Thus Spinoza breaks with the scholastic tradition, according to which the essence of a thing is that which resists change in opposition to the accidental features of a thing that do change. What does, however, remain identical over time is this precise capacity for change that each thing possesses. To better alleviate the difficulties surrounding the ambiguity of this Spinozist proposition, Ramond reexamines the notion of a *quantum* of power, in the aim of showing that if there is a variation this is a variation not of the *quantum* of power, but *in* it, i.e., within the quantitative limits set by its essence. Deleuze, for his part, defines the essence of the mode by the degrees of power in observance of which the precise ratio of movement and rest among its parts remains undisturbed, any such essence being written into the infinite succession of all modes. Furthermore, in order to explain the variations in degrees of acting and to elucidate the essence of modes, it is necessary to externalize one's point of view and interest oneself not only in the internal structure of a thing, but also in its relations to other, external things. Macherey invites us to do just this by bringing into relief the intrinsic positivity of the essence of singular things, rejecting all negativity to the side of external things.

Likewise, in light of Deleuze's reading of *Ethics* Part 3, there can also be added to the mix a third term in addition to qualitative and quantitative variation, namely, dynamic variation. Inasmuch as Deleuze assimilates Spinoza's concept of the power of acting to Leibniz's concept of force, one sees here what Deleuze owes in his reading of Spinoza to his reading of Leibniz. Both the power of acting and force evoke the same activity, the same positivity, and the same affirmation of the existence of the essence of a singular thing. This alignment allows Spinoza, following Deleuze, for

gradual variation without upending his basic point, that an essence must remain fixed and inalterable: an essence is always active, and only affects which are themselves active belong to it; passive affects come from outside a thing and limit the expression of its power of acting, or *conatus*, understood as a power of being affected. On a particularly conciliatory note (not without Leibnizian undertones), Duffy maintains: "The apparent contradiction vanishes." The differences in the "plans" of expression are, on his reading, the key to make sense of Spinoza's system's coherence.

Despite the brio with which Duffy executes his operation, one might be tempted, however, to question the necessity of performing any such operation whose aim is to "save the system" from any ambiguity and exonerate the doctrine of its difficulties. It is in effect strange to attempt to oppose the ontology of beginning of the *Ethics*, which is developed with specific goals and problems in mind, to the anthropology of the middle of the *Ethics*, wherein we find the affects at play and which is the most meaningful part of the work. Can one really speak of incoherence or contradiction? Spinozism, it rather appears, poses a number of theoretical problems as soon as it is attributed the quality of being a system. The theoretical problem of particularization, which bears on the passage from substance and its attributes to the reality of the modes, and which many a commentator has struggled with, is certainly not itself resolved by underscoring the *conatus* and the dynamic dimension involved in the experience that we have of being modes. Nevertheless, Part 1's general ontology is truly commanded by the ethical necessity of liberating man from the processes of internal and external domination. Likewise, the equivalence established at E3p6d must be taken seriously: the actual essence, the definition of an individual, the "philosophical monstrosity that is the essence of a mode"<sup>8</sup> which constitutes one of Spinozism's most original trademarks, cannot be thought of as independent from the "ethical anthropology"<sup>9</sup> proposed in Parts 3 and 4. The philosophical monstrosity refers to the assembly of essence, which in the Platonic tradition was both general and immutable, and mode, a reality that is only relative and can only have an existence or an essence that is extrinsic, modes beings effects and properties of substance: that by which it acts and understands itself. As much as they are modes of substance, singular things are endowed with a certain quantity of power which delimits the *conatus*, the effort of a thing to strive "in its being."

Power is conceived as an infinite productivity, a causal efficaciousness, and it is because the divine essence is understood to be power that Spinoza's anthropology, along with the practical effects that individuals can produce, can be linked to Spinoza's ontology. The effort or the part of power ascribed to singular beings is itself understood as a capacity to act and to operate. It is first and foremost the

power to act that defines essence, which is to say that the definition or nature of a thing is linked to its intrinsic productivity, and its aptitude to produce and sustain effects, such things that it has the “power to do” in accordance with the “laws of its nature.” Likewise, a thing can “become other” without “changing its form,” to the degree that its nature is in large part built upon its encounters with other things. In other words, if Part 3 seems to suddenly precipitate us into a world of movement and variation, movement and variation were in fact already latent in the beginning of the *Ethics*, in virtue of the fact that the redefinition of the notion of power grounds a dynamic ontology. This is especially salient if we turn to Spinoza’s treatment of human life and his treatment of how an individual can be variously constructed without changing form. From such a point of view, is it not true that any individual must always be another while remaining itself?

The intermodal determinism described at the opening of the *Ethics* could only but lead to an eminently social anthropology. Moreover, Spinozist determinism does not ground an absolute limitation of individual power. The relations an individual nourishes with other things similar to it define an individual’s “trajectory.” E4p4 shows that inasmuch as man is a part of Nature, he necessarily is passive and subject to changes of which he is only an inadequate cause.<sup>10</sup> If we never abandon our essence or form, though we remain capable of augmenting or diminishing our power of acting, this is only because we are modes and as such we are conceivable only within the framework set by a fundamental form of coexistence or social life: we do not exist alone, and so we exist in this intermodal, social way. Affective variation is therefore not extrinsic to an essence, but rather it is constitutive of it. Similarly, there is a place within the *quantum* of power that we inherit for a singular history. This variation suggests a way for modes to interact loosely—instead of freely—and that throughout the intervention of a plurality of causes, determinism admits evolutions which are not the realization of a predetermined plan. This is what the Spinozistic concept of *ingenium* is meant to evoke: the individual or collective *ingenia* can be compared to a kind of weaving together, within different individuals or human groups, of distinct causal series, i.e., it points to physical and mental dispositions and their being shaped by external relations and encounters.<sup>11</sup> “A chain of determinations bound up to form the course of an individual life,”<sup>12</sup> the *ingenium* or mentality, we may say, results from this difference, from this variability bound by a determinism that has nothing to do with a predeterminism. The actual essence of each thing, understood as a power of acting that varies as modes reciprocally determine one another, introduces a form of becoming or historicity into things, which biographies and personal trajectories illustrate.<sup>13</sup> Spinoza’s concept of *conatus* or

effort is motivated by the fact that the encounter with external things can increase or decrease the power of acting. Inasmuch as a thing is challenged over the course of its existence, its power of acting cannot only be seen as the expression of a divine power, since it must overcome obstacles and make an effort. If there is a modification in a thing's power of acting, that can only mean that it struggles against "headwinds" to preserve its power, singular things being parts of Nature or of divine substance and as such subject to change over the course of their relations with other things.<sup>14</sup> The "tailwinds," the "good encounters" which augment our power of acting, orient our history, and guide us in our accomplishments are also components of this loosely tight determinism. To further pursue our maritime metaphor, the speed with which a boat can sail, considering its construction, the physical constraints imposed on it by the materials, and the weather conditions, form the limit within which it is capable of finding its own path, its own rhythm, despite any obstacles and the currents it must traverse. At the intersection of such constraints, the clever captain will know how to bring the boat to port and not allow it to be beaten about by the waves, all while maintaining the boat's integrity. The good use of external things is, in the same way, the condition of the health of the body and the mind, and maintaining a healthy equilibrium, both qualitative and quantitative, is the wise man's main objective.<sup>15</sup> The "uninterrupted affective flux" is therefore not a secondary element; it is rather that which allows the individual to express its power of acting.

Spinozism cannot be broken into two parts, as if there were a Spinozist metaphysics the aim of which is to fix once and for all that which a thing is, a Spinozist ethics, according to which, suddenly, everything is thrown into a permanent state of instability and wherein essences are annihilated by the inherent variations implied by the concept of the *conatus*. The dynamic features of Spinoza's ontology serve to ground Spinoza's anthropology of variation and becoming. His ethical theory would teach us to not succumb to the flux, but to sustain it, to orient it, and to become its adequate cause.

## Notes

- 1 His translations of Deleuze's lectures on Spinoza (1971–87) are noteworthy in this regard.
- 2 E1p34: "God's power is his essence itself."
- 3 Cf. Pierre Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza, tome 3: La vie affective* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995), 90.



- 4 E1p16: "From the necessity of the divine nature there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many modes (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect.)"
- 5 Spinoza develops this in the "short physical treatise" interwoven between E2p13 and E2p14.
- 6 Cf. Macherey, *Introduction*, 120–121.
- 7 E4pr: "But the main thing to note is that when I say that someone passes from a lesser to a greater perfection, and the opposite, I do not understand that he is changed from one essence, or form, to another. For example, a horse is destroyed as much if it is changed into a man as if it is changed into an insect. Rather, we conceive that his power of acting, insofar as it is understood through his nature, is increased or diminished."
- 8 Cf. François Zourabichvili, *Spinoza: Une physique de la pensée* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2002), 94.
- 9 Julie Henry's work is especially helpful in this respect. Her goal is to think the historicity and becoming of singular things within the framework of Spinoza's non-predetermined determinism. See Julie Henry, *Spinoza, une anthropologie éthique. Variations affectives et historicité de l'existence* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2015).
- 10 E4p4: "It is impossible that a man should not be a part of Nature, and that he should be able to undergo no changes except those which can be understood through his own nature alone, and of which he is the adequate cause."
- 11 Chantal Jaquet shows how the concept of *ingenium* allows us to better think contemporary social issues and class mobility in *Les transclasses ou la non-reproduction* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2014).
- 12 Jaquet, *Les transclasses*, 102.
- 13 For more on this, see Barthélemy Durrive and Julie Henry, *Redéfinir l'individu à partir de sa trajectoire: Hasard, déterminismes et rencontres* (Paris: Éditions Matériologiques, 2015), esp. "Quel sort réserver au hasard selon la philosophie spinoziste ? Vers une définition historique des individus."
- 14 E3p59s: "From what has been said it is clear that we are driven about in many ways by external causes, and that, like waves on the sea, driven by contrary winds, we toss about, not knowing our outcome and fate."
- 15 E4p45s: "It is the part of a wise man, I say, to refresh and restore himself in moderation [...] For the human Body is composed of a great many parts of different natures, which constantly require new and varied nourishment, so that the whole Body may be equally capable of all the things which can follow from its nature, and hence, so that the Mind also may be equally capable of understanding many things."

## Part II

# Philosophy of Mind



# Spinoza's Two Claims about the Mind-Body Relation

Alison Peterman

## Introduction

How is a particular mind related to its body?<sup>1</sup> There are many ways to understand this question, and many different answers for those different ways. Spinoza makes a number of claims about this relationship, all of which are independently interesting. But it is not clear that they are compatible. In this chapter, I would like to focus on two of those claims, and to argue that although Spinoza sometimes run these two claims together, in fact he does not succeed in making them compatible with one another. I suggest that the illusion that they are compatible comes from an equivocation between two ways of using the phrase “insofar as” [*quatenus*], and that this type of equivocation runs deep in Spinoza's metaphysics.

Those two claims are:

- (1) **Parallelism:** the mind is causally and structurally linked to other minds in the same way that its body is linked to other bodies;
- (2) **Idea-of:** the mind is the idea of its body; or, the body is the object [*objectum*] of its mind.

In focusing on these two, I will ignore some of those other interesting things that Spinoza writes about the mind-body relationship. For example, I will for the most part ignore his account of it in the earlier *Short Treatise*, where he claims that love constitutes the union of the mind with the body.<sup>2</sup> But I will also ignore another of Spinoza's commitments that might look more relevant: that the mind and the body are “one and the same thing, understood in two different ways” (E2p7s). There is a lot that is interesting about this claim, but I think it is fair to

put it aside in thinking through the relationship between **Parallelism** and **Idea-of**.<sup>3</sup> Here is a condensed argument for why.

Either Spinoza's dictum that the mind and the body are "one and the same thing" amounts to the claim that the mind and the body are numerically identical,<sup>4</sup> or it does not. If it does not, then we will have to interpret it in light of Spinoza's other commitments about the mind-body relationship. But then it can't really be used to understand those commitments. If it does amount to the claim that the mind and the body are numerically identical, then although it delivers to us an interesting ontological fact, that fact does not tell us anything more about the metaphysical, causal or explanatory relationship between the mind and the body. Presumably a very important part of what we want to know when we ask how the mind relates to the body is an understanding of the properties and functions of the mind and the body, and of how the properties and functions of one relate to the properties and functions of the other. But if Spinoza thinks that the mind and body are identical, then he denies the indiscernibility of identicals for many of the properties and functions you might be interested in knowing about. For example, just because a body is in a certain place or has a certain speed does not mean that the mind that is identical to it does, and just because the mind can represent bodies doesn't mean that the body that is identical to it can. And indeed, Spinoza never really uses the claim that the mind and the body are one and the same thing to explain anything about the mind and the body—with one exception, which I will mention later.

In what follows, I'll outline Spinoza's justifications for these two claims about the relationship between the mind and the body, **Parallelism** and **Idea-of**, and show that the arguments are entirely independent of one another. Then I'll consider how Spinoza tries to connect them, show that he does not succeed, and draw a few lessons from that.

In the next section, I will make a few preliminary comments about E2p7 and its scholium, and about E1a4, which Spinoza claims entails E2p7. In Section II, I will outline the argument for **Parallelism**, and in Section III, I will outline the argument for **Idea-of**. Section IV shows that there is some precedent in Descartes for distinguishing between two approaches to discovering the mind-body connection.

## I. E2p7 and E1a4

E2p7 and the accompanying demonstration, corollary and scholium are integral to understanding both **Parallelism** and **Idea-of**.

The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things. [E2p7]

This is clear from 1a4. For the idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect. [E2p7d]

The thinking substance and the extended substance are one and the same substance, which is not comprehended under this attribute, now under that. So also a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing, but expressed in two ways [...] For example, a circle existing in nature and the idea of the existing circle [...] are one and the same thing, which is explained through different attributes. Therefore, *whether we conceive nature under the attribute of Extension, or under the attribute of Thought, or under any other attribute, we shall find one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes, i.e. that the same things follow one another.* [my italics] [E2p7s]

Yitzhak Melamed has, I think convincingly, shown that E2p7 and the italicized portion of E2p7s are different claims and that Spinoza relies on them in different contexts. E2p7—what Melamed calls “Ideas-Things Parallelism”—tells us something special about ideas and about their relationships with their objects. Meanwhile, E2p7s—what Melamed calls “Inter-Attributes Parallelism”—tells us about modes of different attributes in general: a mode of any attribute has the same causal and structural connections with the other modes of its attribute as its “parallel” mode does with the other modes of its attribute. This is true for all modes of all the attributes—not just extension and thought—and it tells us nothing about the relation between an idea and its object [*objectum*], or what it is the idea of.<sup>5</sup>

I agree that these are distinct, but I think that Spinoza runs them together a bit more than Melamed allows. For example, Melamed claims that Spinoza only thinks that parallel modes in different attributes are one and the same thing, but not that an idea and its object are one and the same thing.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, I think that Spinoza does imply, at E2p7s, that an idea and its object are one and the same thing. He writes that “a mode of extension and the idea of that mode are one and the same thing” and that the Hebrews saw this when they “maintained that God, God’s intellect, and the things understood by him are one and the same.” And Spinoza seems to be using these considerations to motivate a slide from one to the other.

In preparation for considering their uses in the proofs of **Parallelism** and **Idea-of**, I’d like to consider here how Spinoza justifies E2p7 and E2p7s.

E2p7 is, notoriously, laconically proven from E1a4:

This is clear from 1a4. For the idea of each thing caused depends on the knowledge of the cause of which it is the effect. [E2p7d]

E1a4 is doubtless one of the most fundamental commitments of Spinoza's metaphysics:

The knowledge [*cognitio*] of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause. [E1a4]

Taking these together and focusing on involvement for simplicity's sake, these suggest that Spinoza holds the following:

**Involves:** The idea of an effect involves the idea of its cause.

The meaning of **Involves** depends, of course, on the meaning of "involves" [*involvere*]. I cannot give a complete treatment of Spinoza's use of involve here,<sup>7</sup> but would just like to observe that there are two very natural ways of reading **Involves**.<sup>8</sup>

Let's call the first one the *mechanistic* reading of **Involves** (**InvolvesM**). On **InvolvesM**, to say that the idea of A involves the idea of B is not to say much more than that the idea of B is at least a partial cause of the idea of A. E1a4 is used in this in the alternate demonstration of E2p5, where Spinoza is arguing that ideas can only be caused by other modes of thought; it is used similarly in the demonstration of E2p6.

The second reading is the *semantic* reading of **Involves** (I'll call it **InvolvesS**). On **InvolvesS**, to say that the idea of A involves the idea of B is to say that the content of the idea of A includes the content of the idea of B as a part. That Spinoza sometimes means *Involves* to have this sense is evident from certain applications of E1a4. For example, in the demonstration of E2p16, Spinoza cites E1a4 to show that the ideas of modes of affections of a given body "will necessarily involve the *nature* of each body [my italics]." The *nature*, not the idea, of each body. We know that there cannot be a direct **InvolvesM** relationship between the nature of the body and the idea of the body, since the body is a mode of extension and the idea is a mode of thought, and there can be no **InvolvesM** between modes of two different attributes.<sup>9</sup>

Rather, Spinoza is trying to show here that (for example) my mind represents my body when it represents any affection of my body. This is ultimately supposed to demonstrate that we have knowledge of our bodies through our affections, so it seems that Spinoza thinks that our bodies are represented as parts of the content of ideas of affections. On **InvolvesM**, there is no reason to think that the representational content of the idea of a cause is any part of the content of the idea of its effect. On **InvolvesS**, there is.

Of course, Spinoza clearly takes there to be a connection between **InvolvesS** and **InvolvesM**. But it is not obvious that this connection is justified by more

than just the fact that E1a4 can be read in both ways. There has been, in recent years, a lot of incredible work on Spinoza's account of representation, and how it relates to causal relationships.<sup>10</sup> I take my contribution here to be very modest: to identify one particular argumentative gulf Spinoza needs to cross to connect these two claims with one another.

## II. Parallelism

**Parallelism** says that a mind is causally and structurally linked to other minds in the same way as its body is to other bodies. First, I'll show that Spinoza holds it. Then, I'll outline what I take his justification for holding it to be.

Perhaps the best evidence that Spinoza endorses it as a general principle is E3p2s combined with E2p7s. In E3p2s, Spinoza ridicules Cartesian interactionism, and appeals to E2p7s as an alternative explanation of apparent interaction, concluding that it is:

more clearly understood from what is said in E2p7s, viz. that the Mind and the Body are one and the same thing ... The result is that the order, or connection, of things is one, whether nature is conceived under this attribute or that; hence the order of actions and passions of our Body is, by nature, at one with the order of actions and passions of the Mind. [E3p2s]

In invoking E2p7s in the context of the mind-body relation, Spinoza is relying on his claim that a mind is just an idea, which he won't establish until E2p11.<sup>11</sup> That he concludes that the mind and its body are causally or structurally linked in the same way with other modes of their respective attributes is clear from Spinoza's claim that "the order of actions and passions" of the mind and the body are one.

What is Spinoza's justification for **Parallelism**? In particular, what is his argument for E2p7s—the claim there that "the order, or connection, of things is one, whether nature is conceived under this attribute or that"—what Melamed calls "Inter-Attribute Parallelism"? The fact that it is a scholium of E2p7 suggests that it relies on E2p7, but Spinoza makes no appeal to E2p7 in arguing for E2p7s. Instead, he implies this argument: my mind and my body are modes of one and the same substance, and hence are "one and the same thing," expressed in two ways. Because they are "one and the same thing [...] explained through different attributes," we find "one and the same order, or one and the same connection of causes" when we conceive nature under any attribute.



I said earlier that Spinoza doesn't rely on the claim that the mind and the body are one and the same thing to show anything else about the mind and the body, with one exception. This is the exception that I had in mind: the "one and the same" claim seems to play an ineliminable role in establishing Inter-Attribute Parallelism and hence **Parallelism**. But rather than approach this fact by trying to determine what Spinoza takes the "one and the same" claim to be in general, and plugging that into the proof here, I am going to look at what the "one and the same" claim is doing in this particular spot. And at least here, Spinoza is emphasizing that a mode of extension and a mode of thought are modes of one and the same substance, expressed in two ways. Now I grant that this is true of a given mode of thought and *any* mode of extension, so it doesn't seem to tell us much about the relationship between the mind and its body—and this is a problem. But I think it *does* correctly point us to why Spinoza thinks that the order and connection of causes is the same in any attribute: it is because every attribute expresses the same substance.

Why think that the fact that every attribute expresses the same substance entails that every attribute is characterized by the same causal or structural facts? Spinoza doesn't tell us here. But I think that he is implicitly relying on an intuition he expresses earlier, in the corollary to E2p6. E2p6 and its demonstration establish that modes of an attribute are caused by God only insofar as God is considered under that attribute. But the corollary goes further, claiming that it follows from this that "the objects of ideas follow and are inferred from their attributes in the same way and by the same necessity as that with which we have shown ideas to follow from the attribute of Thought" [E2p6c]. Now this concerns ideas and what they are of, so it seems related to what Melamed would call Ideas-Objects Parallelism and not Inter-Attribute Parallelism. But as I have said, I am not sure that Spinoza separates these *quite* so clearly as Melamed suggests. And it is also about modes and how they can validly be inferred from their attributes, in terms that do not appeal to the special relationship between an idea and its object. It's hard to know for sure how Spinoza relates the "way and necessity" of E2p6c with the "order and connection" of E2p7s. But their proximity and similarity of themes and language suggest that Spinoza associates the necessity of God's power with the order of modes in their respective attributes or God. If, as Spinoza claims in Part 1, "things could have been produced by God in no other way, and in no other order, than they have been produced" [E1p33], then they were not produced by God in any other way in any of the attributes. The thought is something like this: if the order is necessary, it is the same in any attribute.

In short: Spinoza holds **Parallelism** about the mind-body relation on the basis of Inter-Attribute Parallelism in general, and he holds Inter-Attribute Parallelism in general because he thinks that the necessity of God's nature and God's power (somehow) guarantees that the causal order in any attribute is the same. The argument bypasses E1a4 and E2p7 entirely.

### III. Idea-of

That the human mind is the idea of the human body is the point of E2p13:

The object of the idea constituting the human mind is the body, or a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else. [E2p13]

Spinoza claims that this shows “not only that the human mind is united to the body, but also what should be understood by the union of mind and body.”<sup>12</sup>

E2p13 is established by a complex argument that begins with Axiom 4 of Part 2:

We feel [*sentimus*] that a certain body is affected in many ways. [E2a4]

We don't feel the affections of anything else [E2p5]. Axiom 4 appeals to a first-personal observation: that we feel the affections of a particular body. Spinoza uses Axiom 4 interchangeably with several others, including:

We have\* ideas of the affections of a body.

We perceive the affections of a body.

The ideas of the affections of a body are in\* my mind.

I put a star on “have” and “in” to remind us that whatever sense of “to have an idea” or “in my mind” Spinoza intends by such claims, it is specific only to the special way that we have ideas of our own body. This is clear from its use to establish E2p13—that the object of the mind is the body. On a perfectly natural way of understanding “to have an idea,” we have ideas of the affections of lots of bodies besides our own: I have the ideas of croquet balls clacking against each other, or the rustle of leaves on a tree. But that doesn't show that my body is the tree or a croquet ball. Spinoza must think that we have ideas of the affections of our own body in a special way.

The argument for E2p13 is actually for three claims: that the mind is the idea of the body, that the body exists, and that the mind is not the idea of anything else. For the sake of simplicity, I'll focus on the first. The gist of the argument is this:

- (1) The ideas of the affections of a certain body (call it B) are in my mind.  
(E2a4)
  - (2) If the object of my mind were not B, then the idea of the affections of B would not be in\* my mind. (E2p9c and E2p11c)
- 
- (3) The object of my mind is B (1,2).

The question here is: Why should we accept Premise 2? How does Spinoza reason from the observation that I feel, or have\* ideas of, certain affections to the claim that my body is the object of my mind?

Spinoza justifies Premise 2 by appeal to E2p9c and E2p11c. Let's look at E2p9c first, starting with E2p9 itself:

The idea of a singular thing which actually exists has God for a cause not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea of a singular thing which actually exists; and of this idea God is also the cause, insofar as he is affected by another third idea, and so on, to infinity. [E2p9]

Here is my reconstruction of the proof:

- (1) An idea of a thing is a mode of thinking. (E2p5 says that this is "known through itself"—at least, that the formal being of an idea is a mode of thinking.)
- (2) A mode of thinking has God for a cause not absolutely but "insofar as he is considered to be affected by another mode of thinking ... and so on, to infinity." (E1p28)
- (3) "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of causes [NS: things]." (E2p7)
- (4) "The cause of one singular idea is another idea, or, God insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea ... and so on, to infinity." (1–3)

The sense of the proof is this. E1p28 tells us that every finite thing must have a finite cause. Spinoza takes this to entail that God is the cause of a mode of thought insofar as he is affected by another mode of thought, and not absolutely. Since ideas are modes of thought, an idea must be caused by a mode of thought. To be honest, I find the use of E2p7 at this point somewhat obscure. What Spinoza still has to do is show that the mode of thought that causes the idea is also an idea, and that it is an idea of a singular thing which actually exists. Does Spinoza think that E2p7 achieves one or both of these? I myself cannot see how.

What I would like to focus on, putting aside the appeal to E2p7, is Spinoza's use of the phrase "insofar as" in (2) and (4). The reason it is important to start

here is that the phrase is introduced here and is integral to E2p9c, which in turn is used to demonstrate the critical Premise 2. Although Spinoza uses “insofar as” [*quatenus*] hundreds of other times in the *Ethics*, in diverse contexts, this is the first time Spinoza has invoked God insofar as he is considered to be affected by a finite mode.<sup>13</sup> So we can only look to the meaning that this argument licenses, the meaning that Spinoza wants it to have in E2p13, and its use at E2p11. And it seems from these occurrences that when Spinoza writes that the cause of an idea—call it  $I_y$ —is in God insofar as God is considered to be affected by another idea,  $I_x$ , that just means that  $I_x$  causes  $I_y$ . So the conclusion of E2p9 is just something like this: every finite  $I_y$  is caused by some finite  $I_x$ . That is all that Spinoza is justified in concluding at this stage.

E2p9c is demonstrated from that in the following way:

- (1) For any affection (“A”) of a thing (“T”), there is an idea of that affection (“I(A)”) in God. (E2p3)
- (2) I(A) is in God only insofar as God is considered to be affected by another idea (“I(X)”) of a singular thing (“X”). (E2p9)
- (3)  $X = T$ . (E2p7)

- 
- (4) I(A) is in God only insofar as God is considered to be affected by I(B).

Spinoza invokes E2p3: basically, God has an idea of everything, so there is an idea of every affection of a body. This idea is in God only insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea. Spinoza now introduces the claim that an idea is in God *only* insofar as God is considered to be affected by another idea: the “only” is new. What does it signify? The demonstration, as well as the use of E2p9, makes quite clear that the “only” is intended to rule out the possibility that a finite idea is caused by God *insofar as God is infinite*. Spinoza then invokes E2p7 to show that the finite idea in question is the idea of what is affected. So, for example, an idea of an affection of my body is in God only insofar as God has the idea of my body.

Again, the “only” here means “and not insofar as God is infinite.” It does not mean “and not insofar as God has the idea of anything else.” Nothing about this demonstration entails that God has the ideas of my affections only insofar as he has the idea of my body, and not insofar as he has the ideas of other bodies. And this is as it should be. Spinoza is treating the relationship between my body and its affections as a causal relationship here, and Spinoza explicitly and importantly holds that the affections of my body have many other causes besides my own body. This is, of course, the very ground of inadequate cognition,

according to Spinoza. E2p9 and E2p9c apply equally to all of the partial causes of the affections of my body—not just to my body.

Finally, let us consider how Spinoza wants to use E2p9c in the argument for E2p13:

- (1) The ideas of the affections of a certain body are in my mind. (E2a4)
- (2) If the object of my mind were not my body, then the ideas of the affections of the body would not be in God insofar as God constituted my mind.  
(E2p9c)
- (3) To say that the ideas of the affections of the body are in God insofar as God constitutes my mind is just to say that the ideas of the affections of the body are in my mind, or that my mind perceives the affections of my body.  
(E2p11c)
- (4) If the object of my mind were not the body, then the ideas of the affections of the body would not be in my mind. (2,3)

- 
- (5) The object of my mind is the body that I feel the affections of (1,4).

Why does Spinoza feel entitled to rephrase E2p9c as Premise 2 here, or conclude Premise 2 on the basis of E2p9c?

To simplify things, let's consider just the singular version of Premise 2:

- (2') If the object of my mind were not my body, then the idea of any affection of that body would not be in God insofar as God constituted my mind. (E2p9c)

But 2' is false. If I lean against a wall, the idea of the affection is in God insofar as God constitutes my mind but equally insofar as God constitutes the mind of the wall.

There are two ways to try to address this problem. One is to point out that Spinoza does *\*not\** make the singular claim here. He makes the claim that if the object of my mind weren't my body, then all the ideas of the affections of that body would not be in my mind. And that is true. This certainly gets around the problem, and maybe it is the solution that Spinoza intended.

But this problem, and the alternative solution, I think reveal a deeper point about what is going on in this argument. To see this, we first need to see the role that Premise 2 plays in the argument for E2p13.

Remember that this argument is supposed to proceed from the claim that I have the ideas of certain affections to the claim that my mind is the idea of my body. And Premise 2 functions by motivating Premise 4: that if the object of my mind were not my body, then the ideas of its affections would not be in

my mind. In conjunction with Premise 1—that the ideas of the affections of a certain body are in my mind—we arrive at the conclusion.

But Premise 1 is supposed to be a restatement of E2a4: “We feel that a certain body is affected in many ways.” I think it is clear that Spinoza takes this axiom to be self-evident not because it immediately strikes the mind as true, but rather because everyone is evidently aware of the feelings of being affected. That is: its plausibility relies on the fact that we have a certain kind of self-evident, first-person experience of being affected. This experience is our only evidence that the ideas of the affections of the body are in God insofar as God constitutes my mind. So it is plausible to think that this is reflected in my mental contents, and indeed, in mental contents of which I am aware. That is to say: for this argument to work, the claim that an idea is in God “insofar as God constitutes my mind” implies something about the content of that idea: the content of that idea includes, in some sense, the content of the idea of my body.

So, in the proof of E2p13, the claim that “the ideas of the affections are in God only insofar as God constitutes my mind” means that the ideas of the affections of my body are part of the content of God’s idea of my body, and so there is awareness of the ideas of those affections only insofar as there is awareness of the body. But that is not the sense of “the ideas of the affections are in God only insofar as God constitutes my mind” that is licensed by E2p9c. The sense licensed by E2p9c is just that the idea of my body must be in God if the idea of my body’s affections are to be in God.

Following the terminology introduced in Section I’s discussion of E1a4, we might call the sense of “insofar as” that is licensed by E2p9c here the “mechanistic” sense, and we might call the sense that is required by E2p11c and E2p13 the “semantic” sense. In the mechanistic sense of “insofar as,” we can provide both physical and mental examples:

Physical: one billiard ball moves only insofar as another billiard ball moves.

Mental: one idea is in God (or exists) only insofar as another idea is in God (or exists).

It is a little more difficult to give a semantic example in the case of the physical, but there may be resources in Carriero’s or Garrett’s accounts of inherence<sup>14</sup>:

Physical: maybe inherence, if effects inhere in their causes?

Mental: the idea of John’s hand exists only insofar as the idea of John exists.

Spinoza does not obviously connect these two senses up with one another. It’s worth noting that until he does, we don’t have a reason to think that the body that

is “connected to” my mind in the “idea-of” sense and the body that is connected to my mind in the parallelism sense are the same body. And this is where E2p11c comes in. E2p11c is the claim that a particular sort of mental item that we can identify from the inside is identical with a particular sort of metaphysical item:

- (3) To say that the ideas of the affections of the body are in God insofar as God constitutes my mind is just to say that the ideas of the affections of the body are in my mind, or that my mind perceives the affections of my body. (E2p11c)

And, unfortunately, Spinoza simply gives no argument for E2p11c.

## Conclusion

Zooming out a bit here: to connect up E2p9c to E2p13, Spinoza needs to answer a very deep and a very hard question. We would like to know what mental experiences—ideas, phenomenal states, states of consciousness—are: What sort of metaphysical items are they? What properties do they have? How do they fit in among the other bits of furniture in the world? We would like to be able to study them objectively, or scientifically. But our starting point for characterizing these states seems to be first-personal. How can we move from this first-person perspective to the one from which we want to characterize the objective features of mental items?<sup>15</sup>

Spinoza’s way of grappling with this involves trying to square the **Parallelism** about the mind-body relation with **Idea-of**. These represent two different ways of approaching the question: How does the mind relate to its body? The first approach starts with some metaphysical commitments about the kinds of entities, properties, and interactions there are in the world. The second approach starts by attending to the experience of the embodied subject. Spinoza’s **Parallelism** arises from the first approach, and **Idea-of** arises from the second.

This distinction is, in fact, even clearer and it is explicit in Descartes.<sup>16</sup> Descartes makes a number of metaphysical claims about minds, bodies, and their relationship to one another. On the basis of these, he argues that a human mind and body interact with one another, relying on an interactionist account in a number of works, especially those that develop his theory of the passions. But when Princess Elisabeth presses him on the problems that arise from positing interaction between the mind and the body, Descartes has a very different story to tell about the union between the mind and the body. That story is developed

from observing the special qualities of his own sensations, which indicate to him that the body in which he feels those sensations “more than any other, belong[s] to [him]” and can never be separated from him.<sup>17</sup>

In his exchange with Elisabeth, Descartes explicitly treats these as two different perspectives, approaches, or emphases. He tells her that she can think about the distinction between the mind and the body only in spite of having conceived their union, since:

It does not seem to me that the human mind is capable of forming a very distinct conception of both the distinction between the soul and the body and their union; for to do this it is necessary to conceive them as a single thing and at the same time to conceive them as two things, and this is absurd.<sup>18</sup>

According to Descartes, it is our “metaphysical meditations” that teach us that the body and the soul are distinct. But he tells Elisabeth that it is only once we give up these metaphysical meditations, and observe the sensations in our own bodies, that we can conceive of the union between body and mind.

I have tried to show that in Spinoza, although it is less explicit, we can find a similar split. Like Descartes’s own union account, Spinoza’s starts with some first person premises. These premises concern, in particular, the felt quality of sensations—or, in Spinoza’s terms, ideas of affections, where affections are just states of the body arising from its interaction with other bodies. Meanwhile, we can compare Spinoza’s claim that the mind and body are parallel with Descartes’s treatment of the mind and body as interacting substances. Both accounts of embodiment start with the metaphysical claims that the mind and the body are conceived under different attributes. Both are aimed at explaining the appearance of mind-body interaction. Both see the problem of mind-body interaction as an instance of the more general problem of inter attribute interaction.

Ultimately, the relationship between the two senses of “insofar as” and the two pictures of embodiment will have to be traced back to the relationship between what I believe are two parallel uses of E1a4 and to its use in the arguments for E2p7 and E2p7c. This family of distinctions is, I suspect, grounded in two fundamentally different meanings for the claim that “cognition of an effect depends upon, and involves, cognition of its cause”—in particular two meanings of “depends upon and involves.” If Spinoza never connects up these two meanings, we may infer that there exists a very deep and basic rift driving Spinoza’s system, and thus we could approach a number of Spinoza’s claims and arguments by figuring out how they employ these two meanings.



## Notes

- 1 Versions of some portions of this chapter appeared in a modified form in Alison Peterman, "Descartes and Spinoza: Two Approaches to Embodiment," in *Embodiment: A History*, ed. Justin E. H. Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). That paper goes into more detail about Spinoza's comments on embodiment in other works, like the *Short Treatise*, and also develops a comparison with Descartes in much greater detail. It focuses less than this chapter does on the details of Spinoza's arguments for **Parallelism** and **Idea-of**.
- 2 For a more extended treatment of this account and its relationship to the two discussed here, see Peterman, "Descartes and Spinoza," 236–238.
- 3 For more on the "one and the same" claim, see Colin Marshall, "The Mind and the Body as 'One and the Same Thing' in Spinoza," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 17, no. 5 (2009): 897–919; Don Garrett, "The indiscernibility of identicals and the transitivity of identity in Spinoza's logic of the attributes," in *Spinoza's Ethics: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Ursula Renz, "The Definition of the Human Mind and the Numerical Difference between Subjects (2P11–2P135)," in *Spinoza's Ethics. A Collective Commentary*, ed. Michael Hampe, Ursula Renz, and Robert Schnepf (Leiden: Brill, 2011).
- 4 Of course, it cannot mean that the mind and the body are the same in kind, since they are understood under two different attributes.
- 5 Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Thought: Parallelisms and the Multifaceted Structure of Ideas," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 86, no. 3 (2013): 626–683. See esp. 639–640.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 641.
- 7 Hübner has a brief but helpful discussion of Spinoza's use of it, and references, in "Spinoza on Intentionality and Mental Dependence," *Philosophers' Imprint* (forthcoming).
- 8 Notice that the body is not part of the affection, even though the content of the idea of the body is part of the content of the idea of the affection. This undermines the extensional equivalence of **Parallelism** and **Idea-of**.
- 9 I don't mean to argue just from there being no InvolvesM relationship to there being an InvolvesS relationship, since these don't exhaust the possible interpretations of E1a4 or its use here; only that Spinoza can't mean InvolvesM and is likely, for additional reasons, to mean InvolvesS.
- 10 See, for example, Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Hübner, "Spinoza on Intentionality"; Don Garrett, "Representation, Misrepresentation and Error in Spinoza's Philosophy of Mind," in *The Oxford Handbook of Spinoza*, ed.

- Michael Della Rocca (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Don Garrett, "Representation and Consciousness in Spinoza's Naturalistic Theory of the Imagination," in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, ed. Charlie Huenemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Samuel Newlands, "Thinking, Conceiving and Idealism in Spinoza," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 94, no. 1 (2012): 31–52. Strictly speaking, the noun "*repraesentatio*" is absent from Spinoza's *Ethics*; rather, one only finds the verb, "*repraesentare*."
- 11 The mind is also a collection of ideas, according to E2p15. There is some tension here, between the claim that the mind is the idea of the body—i.e., the idea of a collection of things—and that the mind is a collection of ideas.
  - 12 This is the only place in the *Ethics* that Spinoza mentions a union of mind and body. This is a sign in addition to the Spinoza's account in the *Short Treatise*, account that Spinoza thinks of the mind-body *union* as being primarily constituted by the idea-of (as opposed to, say, **Parallelism** or identity.)
  - 13 For illuminating studies of Spinoza's use of *quatenus* in this and other contexts, see Alexander Douglas, "Quatenus and Spinoza's Monism," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (forthcoming); Mogens Lærke, "*Deus quatenus: Sur l'emploi de particules reduplicatives dans l'Éthique*" in *Lectures Contemporaines de Spinoza*, ed. Claude Cohen-Boulakia, Mireille Delbraccio, and Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de Paris Sorbonne, 2012).
  - 14 See, for example, Don Garrett, "Spinoza's Conatus Argument," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. Olli Koistinen and John Biro (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and John Carriero, "On the Relationship between Mode and Substance in Spinoza's Metaphysics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (1995): 245–273.
  - 15 I think the way I am putting this question has something in common with the challenge that Nagel sees for the scientific study of consciousness in Thomas Nagel, "What is it like to be a bat?," *Philosophical Review* 83, no. 4 (1974): 435–450. What looking at Spinoza (and Descartes) illuminates is that Nagel's problem for studying consciousness only holds if we take the proper starting point for that study to be first-personal experience. But we don't have to.
  - 16 This is articulated at greater length in Peterman, "Two Kinds of Embodiment," esp. 216–224.
  - 17 CSMK III 52/AT III 692.
  - 18 CSMK III 227–228/AT III 695.

# A Response: A Puzzle in Spinoza's Views on the Mind-Body Problem

Jack Stetter

I would like to begin by thanking Alison Peterman for her analysis of Spinoza's accounts of the mind-body problem in Part 2 of the *Ethics*. The fastidious way she scrutinizes Spinoza's claims is recognizably Anglo-American in origin, with its characteristic high level of technicality married to a general desire to get at the arguments and unpack the philosophical truths they would motivate. I think it fair to say, then, that she practices what Jonathan Bennett calls the "collegial" approach to the history of philosophy: the philosophers we read, no matter when they lived and died, are like our colleagues; our duty is to submit them to the same kind of respectful but hard-hitting analysis to which we would submit any of our living philosopher colleagues.<sup>1</sup> In a volume that intends to present the current state of American Spinoza scholarship, it is fitting to include such a chapter.

There is, however, a sense in which the results of Peterman's study can be held as kindred in spirit to some of the classic French literature on Spinoza. Take, for instance, Peterman's concluding claim, namely, that Spinoza never connects the two meanings of "depends upon and involves," both derived from E1a4, which, in turn, explains in part why he adopts "two pictures of embodiment." The disjunction between "two pictures of embodiment," so Peterman claims, speaks to "a very deep and basic rift driving Spinoza's system." So, with regards to the French literature, one might find it fruitful to compare this to Ferdinand Alquié's influential reading of Spinoza in *Le rationalisme de Spinoza*.<sup>2</sup>

According to Alquié, Spinoza attempts to bridge two irreconcilable philosophical endeavors. Alquié construes these two endeavors quite broadly as being religious and scientific in intent, respectively. Hence, on Alquié's understanding, for instance, Spinoza alternatively "divinizes Nature" and

“naturalizes God.”<sup>3</sup> Granted, there is little else about Peterman’s chapter that makes it resemble anything found in Alquié: Alquié, faithful to the tradition of spiritualism in France that harkens back to Descartes’s *Meditations*, believes that it is by introspection that philosophers have their metaphysical experience, and that it is to this personal metaphysical experience that as readers we are meant to be initiated.<sup>4</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Alquié’s commentary is a resolutely first-personal and even confessional statement about the “incomprehensibility” of Spinoza.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the fact remains that Alquié also shows that there is some “very deep and basic rift driving Spinoza’s system.”

A good characterization of Alquié’s approach is to call it the anatomist’s approach to Spinoza, as opposed to the surgeon’s approach.<sup>6</sup> A surgeon, like Martial Gueroult for example, may make local incisions into his patient, but the goal is to save the whole, and preserve its overall well-being, its internal coherence; Alquié, an anatomist, is happy cutting up and taking apart the dead body on the table, seeing what pieces were really in there all along.<sup>7</sup> Save for the admittedly central fact that Peterman, like other analytically trained philosophers, is quite like Gueroult in virtue of the way she pays very close attention to Spinoza’s arguments, there is nonetheless a sense in which the conclusions of her study are in keeping with Alquié’s otherwise idiosyncratic intuitions.

I will now turn to first-order matters in the study of Spinoza’s treatment of the mind-body problem. For Peterman, Spinoza has two distinct accounts of this problem: **Parallelism** and **Idea-of**.<sup>8</sup> Peterman views the former as grounded in Spinoza’s underlying metaphysical commitment to substance monism. She views the latter as primarily motivated by the first-person intuition that there is something special about the way the mind has ideas of affections of the body. Her suggestion that the latter account stands on its own is well-shored up by E2a4, where Spinoza baldly asserts: “We feel that a certain body is affected in many ways.” Moreover, following Peterman, we should interpret E2p13d, the proof for Spinoza’s identification of the mind as the idea of the body, as follows: on Spinoza’s understanding, the fact that ideas of affections of the body are in God only insofar as God constitutes the idea of the body is by itself meant to motivate **Idea-of**. According to Peterman, this suggests the impossibility of squaring the “two pictures of embodiment,” since the claim in E2p13d about the content of the idea of the body is not derived from **Parallelism**, but rather is motivated by an appeal to how God constitutes the idea of the body. On Peterman’s reading, what the proof for Spinoza’s identification of the mind as the idea of the body suggests, therefore, is that Spinoza is implying that there is a certain, special kind of awareness in God’s ideas of bodies that the mind

inherits, which, in turn, is manifest in the experience of the embodied subject. Although at first glance it may appear as if, on Peterman's account, Spinoza is about to turn his back on anti-anthropomorphic naturalism, her account does have a compelling aspect to it, for some supplemental content is necessary to make the move from **Parallelism** to **Idea-of**. It would not be surprising, then, if this supplemental content—awareness or representationality—were somehow grounded in the specific way that the mind is “in” or depends on God and how it involves something about his nature.<sup>9</sup>

For the uninitiated, such a detail in Spinoza's philosophy might appear trivial. But when we look at all this from a broader perspective, the issue's importance is salient. Recall that the nature of any body as a body has nothing to do with the nature of any mind as a mind, since these are modes of two different and utterly incommensurable attributes. Why is it, then, that my mind gives me ideas of affections of my body, i.e., access to my body's states, qualities, or properties? The fact that “the order and the connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things,” to quote E2p7, does not give us the answer. That there is only one selfsame set of causal or structural facts—that “God's [NS: actual] power of thinking is equal to his actual power of acting,” as per E2p7c—does not explain why the mind is aware of the body to which it is specifically attached.

Peterman's interpretation hints at a puzzle, namely whether we can piece together **Parallelism** and **Idea-of**. In what follows, I will explore several aspects to this puzzle. I do not pretend to resolve all of the issues raised, but only to point to various ways of approaching them. I will also discuss Spinoza's conception of relations of involvement, a fundamental issue touched on by Peterman. I will then conclude by noting several more wide-ranging issues suggested by Peterman's interpretation.

Her bold reading heightens the tension between Spinoza's account of the mind-body problem in terms of some idea that is for the body and which replicates it in Thought (**Parallelism**), and the account Spinoza gives of the nature of the mind as the idea of the body (**Idea-of**).<sup>10</sup> A look at E2p19 and its demonstration will clear up what Spinoza takes to be the scope of the content of the mind insofar as it is the idea of the body.<sup>11</sup> At E2p19, Spinoza writes:

The human Mind does not know the human Body itself, nor does it know that it exists, except through ideas of affections by which the Body is affected.  
[E2p19]

In other words, the mind, itself an idea or mode of Thought, not only is the idea of the body, following E2p13, but, moreover, it has ideas of the body's affections,

and it is because it has such ideas that it “knows”—is aware of—the body at all. Spinoza’s demonstration for this is illuminating, especially the first half, because it clarifies why the mind cannot “know” the body in the same way as God, even though the mind is an idea in God of the body:

For the human Mind is the idea itself, *or* [*sive*] knowledge of the human Body (by E2p13), which (by E2p9) is indeed in God insofar as he is considered to be affected by another idea of a singular thing, or because (by E2post4) the human Body requires a great many bodies by which it is, as it were, continually regenerated; and [NS: because] the order and connection of ideas is (by E2p7) the same as the order and connection of causes, this idea will be in God insofar as he is considered to be affected by the ideas of a great many singular things. Therefore, God has the idea of the human Body, *or* [*sive*] knows the human Body, insofar as he is affected by a great many other ideas, and not insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human Mind, i.e. (by E2p11c), the human Mind does not know the human Body.

But the ideas of affections of the Body are in God insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human Mind, or the human Mind perceives the same affections (by E2p12), and consequently (by E2p16) the human Body itself, as actually existing (by E2p17).

Therefore to that extent only, the human Mind perceives the human Body itself, q.e.d. [E2p19d]

The mind has the idea of the body, but the idea of the body the mind has is not the same idea of the body that God has. The first half of this demonstration tells us so much: the idea of the body that is in God and that is the mind includes a “great many” other ideas of other bodies, indeed, all those other bodies that underwrite the existent activity of our body and which keep it “continually regenerated.” Our idea of the body, on the other hand, the one that our mind in fact has, is only in God insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind and not insofar as he is affected by a great many other ideas. And since God constitutes the nature of the human mind such that it “perceives” what “happens” to its object, following E2p12, what this means, to return to the letter of E2p19, is that “the human mind does not know the human body itself [...] except through ideas of affections by which the body is affected.”

Now, logically enough, it would make sense if the fact that there is an idea for the body (**Parallelism**) somehow grounded the fact that there is an idea of it.<sup>12</sup> But this is not what we find in Spinoza. The fact that, for Spinoza, attributes are parallel to one another, and that no interaction among them is permitted,

and that, moreover, for every singular thing there is some idea,<sup>13</sup> does not give us the means to further infer this one important feature about ideas, that ideas are inherently intentional or representational, being about this or that object external to the mind.<sup>14</sup>

On Peterman's reading, the only justification we find for **Idea-of** is that we inherit from the divine mind some of its infinite representational capacity, or omniscience, i.e., some of God's capacity to have ideas of everything.

Interestingly, Peterman shows that Spinoza can do this only by putting to use a second, non-mechanistic, and semantic account of involvement relations, according to which the content of the idea of the cause is "involved in" the content of the idea of the effect. Hence, if I have an idea of my body, following Spinoza, the content of this idea "involves" in a non-mechanistic sense (**InvolvesS**) a representation of its cause, another body. Bodies are represented as parts of the content of our ideas, because the latter "involve" bodies, even if, mechanically (or physically) speaking, no "involvement" (**InvolvesM**) between the two is metaphysically possible. Peterman's treatment of this touches on a delicate issue about Spinoza's views on relations of inherence and involvement. And as Peterman rightly suggests, E1a4 is indeed a crucial text for understanding much of what Spinoza can say about representation and how knowledge "involves" or is about things. Some words about it are in order. At E1a4, Spinoza writes:

The knowledge [*cognitio*] of an effect depends on [*dependet*], and involves [*involvit*], the knowledge of its cause. [E1a4]

On a straightforward reading, part of what E1a4 must mean is that if *p* causes *q*, therefore *q* is conceived through *p*. In recent Anglo-American literature, following Don Garrett, this is referred to as "the causality implying conception doctrine."<sup>15</sup> Spinoza puts E1a4 to such a use at E1p6d, when demonstrating why "one substance cannot be produced by another substance," namely, because if a substance were produced by another substance, the first substance would involve the conception of that other substance in its definition, in virtue of the fact that it would be caused by that other substance, which is flagrantly contradictory to its definition qua substance, a being which is conceived through itself.

On another reading, E1a4 also implies that if *q* is conceived through *p*, then *q* is caused by *p*. That Spinoza takes E1a4 to imply as much can be seen at E1p25d. At E1p25 Spinoza asserts that:

God is the efficient cause, not only of the existence of things, but also of their essence. [E1p25]

Spinoza then argues at E1p25d that:

If you deny this, then God is not the cause of the essence of things; and so (by E1a4) the essence of things can be conceived without God. But (by E1p15) this is absurd. Therefore, God is also the cause of the essence of things, q.e.d. [E1p25d]

Spinoza is arguing from the fact that were God not the efficient cause of the essence of things, then these things could be conceived of without God. In other words, because these are indeed conceived through God, God must be their cause. This has been called, following Garrett, “the conception implying causality doctrine.”<sup>16</sup>

Last, but not least, comes the question of inherence relations. “It is commonly agreed,” as Yitzhak Melamed notes, “that inherence implies causality; the point of contention is whether causality implies inherence.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, is there such a thing as a special causal relation, for Spinoza, which has the distinguishing trait of being such that an inherence relation is implied by it? The obvious path to drawing such a distinction among types of causal relations is between immanent and transient (or transitive) causation. On such a reading, for Spinoza, *q* inheres in its cause *p* and is therefore a state of *p* iff *p* is the immanent cause of *q*. This would putatively allow us to write off cases where, for instance, the effect, on a commonsensical understanding, does not inhere in the causal agent, such as with respect to a table and the carpenter that crafted it. By maintaining that the carpenter is only a transient cause of the table and that Spinoza is willing to admit where necessary a distinction between causal relations that do imply inherence and those that do not, the table need not be held to inhere in the carpenter as a property or state of her, in flagrant contradiction to commonsense.<sup>18</sup> Modes, on the other hand, being such that they are immanently caused by substance, would, however, inhere in substance, as so many properties or states of it.<sup>19</sup>

What is of note at present is that E1a4 can, on some readings, be construed as involving a subtle distinction between causation relations that do and that do not involve inherence relations.

Returning to Peterman’s discussion, on her reading, E1a4 is also flexible enough to accommodate cases wherein there are and are not inherence relations at work. Recall that **Parallelism** is demonstrated by appealing to E1a4. The appeal to E1a4 tells us: knowledge of some body involves knowledge of those other bodies in which it inheres; and, moreover, knowledge of some idea involves knowledge of those other ideas in which it inheres; and, finally, the



fact that these two accounts of knowledge of effects as involving knowledge of causes can be conceived independently of one another means that “the order and connection” of causes and effects is structurally identical across attributes. But that the **Idea-of** the body involves the natures of the causes of the body, other bodies, is also true by virtue of E1a4, as per E2p16d. For Spinoza, however, this cannot mean that the **Idea-of** the body involves such bodily causes by virtue of an inherence relation, since ideas do not inhere in bodies. In other words, for **Idea-of** to work, Spinoza needs E1a4 to additionally mean something like: knowledge of an effect contains, as part of its content, those things which are involved in the effect as its causes, even when an inherence relation is metaphysically impossible.

By way of conclusion, I think some remarks on how **Idea-of** is central to other, more wide-ranging matters in Spinoza’s philosophy would be helpful for the Spinoza-curious reader. Spinoza avails himself of this account to resolve a series of questions, some of which we have already encountered in other forms, such as: why is it that when we have representations of other bodies than our own, we are in fact forming an idea of our body in so far as these other bodies affect it? Moreover, since to have an idea of a body is to have an idea of what explains its properties, why is it that when we have an idea of our body, part of what we are doing is having an idea of the ways in which other bodies are affecting our own body? Last of all, what does this paradoxical aspect of embodiment say about the possibility of our forming adequate knowledge?

For Spinoza, the more the body interacts with other bodies and is diversely affected by them, the more the mind will have ideas of the body, and of other bodies via the body, and of their various “agreements” [*convenientiae*], “differences” [*differentiae*], and “oppositions” [*oppugnantiae*], according to E2p29s. This suggests that the mind can only have adequate knowledge by somehow making use of this material the body gives it. If we look at E2p13s, Spinoza’s makes his general view about this clear:

I say this in general, that in proportion as a Body is more capable [*aptius*] than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once [*ad plura simul agendum vel patiendum*], so its Mind is more capable [*aptior*] than others of perceiving many things at once. [E2p13s]

Spinoza’s point is that the more variegated are the affections of which the body is capable, the more the mind has ideas or is “perceiving many things at once”; and the more variegated are the mind’s ideas, then, the more material it has to

work with as it strives to piece together its understanding of things and its place in them. Hence, by grounding his philosophy of mind in both embodiment and intentionality—which, in unison, give us his theory that ideas are representational of the body itself—and by showing that this, in turn, points the way to a genuine intellectualist ethics, in virtue of the fact that the mind relies on the information provided by the body to measure its agency in interactive scenarios, Spinoza relies on **Idea-of** to make the pivot from a philosophy of mind to an ethical theory. Furthermore, insofar as **Idea-of** is used by Spinoza to describe how mental content consists of representations of the body and its affections, and since the body and its affections are always, for Spinoza, caught up in a network of relations with other bodies and their affections, therefore, Spinoza conceives of the mind as somehow fundamentally interactive. In this respect, Spinoza is putting **Idea-of** to a profoundly anti-Cartesian use.<sup>20</sup>

For Spinoza, because the mind is the idea of the body the mind can have a great range of representability and a wealth of mental content. Perhaps, however, it is because there is an idea for the body that is the mind that the mind does not lose itself in this vast horizon and remains anchored. Still, even if Spinoza hopes later to package these two accounts of the mind-body problem back together into one story of things, Peterman's analysis is compelling. The "order of reasons," as Alquié already showed us, is not so neat after all. **Idea-of** appeals to something intuited and felt and lived, as Descartes himself maintained, as Alquié would have been certainly happy to note, and as Peterman has underlined once more.<sup>21</sup>

## Notes

- 1 See Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Berkeley*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1–10.
- 2 Ferdinand Alquié, *Le rationalisme de Spinoza* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981).
- 3 Ibid., 93–106.
- 4 The term "metaphysical experience" figures prominently in Alquié's writings on Descartes. See, for example, Ferdinand Alquié, *La découverte métaphysique de l'homme chez Descartes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).
- 5 See the Conclusion to Alquié, *Le rationalisme de Spinoza*.
- 6 For more about this, see Charles Ramond, "Deleuze lecteur de Spinoza: La tentation de l'impératif," in *Spinoza contemporain: Philosophie, Éthique, Politique*, ed. Charles Ramond (Paris: Harmattan, 2016), esp. 149 and 152.

- 7 For the canonical representation of Martial Gueroult's holistic method at work, see Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza 1: Dieu* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968). For more about this method, see Gilles Deleuze, "Spinoza et la méthode générale de M. Gueroult," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 47, no. 4 (1969): 426–437 and Knox Peden, *Spinoza contra phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014), esp. ch. 2. In an important recent debate about first-order and second-order matters in Spinoza scholarship, Michael Della Rocca has characterized his own approach to the history of philosophy as "holistic" in opposition to Daniel Garber's putatively "atomistic" approach. See Daniel Garber, "Superheroes in the History of Philosophy: Spinoza, Super-Rationalist," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 3 (2015): 507–522; Michael Della Rocca, "Interpreting Spinoza: The Real Is the Rational," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 3 (2015): 523–536; and Daniel Garber, "Some Additional (But Not Final) Words," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 53, no. 3 (2015): 537–540. For more about this debate, see Jack Stetter, "Revisiting the Della Rocca-Garber Spinoza Debate," in *La philosophie ventriloque*, ed. Valérie Debuiche (Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires AMU, forthcoming).
- 8 By parallelism here I mean inter-attribute parallelism. For more on Spinoza's doctrine of the so-called parallelism of the attributes, see esp. Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Thought: Parallelisms and the Multifaceted Structure of Ideas," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 86, no. 3 (2013): 626–683. Following Melamed's insight, it is misleading to speak of "parallelism," in virtue of the fact that Spinoza has two distinct doctrines of parallelism, namely, "ideas-things parallelism" and "inter-attribute parallelism." The latter gives us the identity of the causal order of all attributes, whereas the former suggests that modes of Thought, unlike modes of other attributes, are unique in virtue of their corresponding to the causal order of things writ large. Melamed sees this metaphysical anomaly as further mirrored in the "multi-faceted structure of ideas" and the priority or "primacy" of Thought, that is, the fact that, for Spinoza, only Thought is "all-encompassing," and only an idea can "distinctly represent each of the infinitely many modes that parallel it." Melamed notes that this priority relation, however, is especially unusual, inasmuch as other attributes are not dependent on or grounded in the attribute of Thought.
- 9 In a similar vein, Margaret Wilson writes that, on Spinoza's account, our ideas are "bits of God's omniscience." See Margaret Dauler Wilson, "Spinoza's Causal Axiom," in *Ideas and Mechanism: Essays on Early Modern Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 147.
- 10 One issue in the literature concerns whether this is a good identification, since Spinoza never spells out the nature or scope of *consciousness*, ostensibly a basic feature of the mind. For a recent presentation of the debate around whether

Spinoza actually has a theory of consciousness, see Eugene Marshall, *The Spiritual Automaton: Spinoza's Science of the Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). Daniel Garber has recently challenged the view that Spinoza has a theory of consciousness in a talk ("Y a-t-il une théorie de la conscience chez Spinoza?") given for the *Séminaire Spinoza à Paris 8*, available online at: [www.spinozaparis8.com](http://www.spinozaparis8.com).

- 11 I thank Dan Garber for drawing this text to my attention.
- 12 Cf. Gueroult, *Spinoza 1*, 242–243. Gueroult also claims that "first of all, the knowledge of the human body that the mind *is* must be logically anterior to the knowledge of the human body that the mind *has*, because the mind would not be able to perceive the affections of this body, nor, consequently, its body, if the mind was not already there so as to perceive them." (Our translation.) Gueroult then proceeds to characterize the former as "congenital" and the latter as "acquired by experience," and further, he maintains that the former is the "container" of all ideas of affections of the body and an "empty form," considered in itself, and in contrast to the latter, which is the "empirical content" of our understanding. He concludes these considerations remarking that even if the former is logically anterior and "congenital" in a sense, experience begins at birth, and, consequently, neither is "chronologically" anterior.
- 13 Again, see Yitzhak Melamed, "Spinoza's Metaphysics of Thought," for a discussion of how this suggests that different and distinct parallelisms are at work.
- 14 I write "one important feature" as a caveat, so as to point to the fact that, for Spinoza, an arguably equally important feature of our ideas is that we can measure their "reality" (or "excellence" or "perfection") without looking at their representational content. Of special note here is Spinoza's discussion at E2p49s of how ideas themselves "involve affirmations." Likewise, Spinoza's definition of an adequate idea as possessing the "intrinsic properties" of a true idea (E2d4) suggests that although all our ideas, being ideas in our mind of our body, may possess "aboutness" as an essential feature, ideas considered in themselves need not be taken to be "about" anything at all. For more about Spinoza on affirmation, see Charles Ramond, "Affirmation verbale et affirmation de la pensée dans la théorie spinoziste de la connaissance," in *Architectures de la Raison: Mélanges offerts à Alexandre Matheron*, ed. Pierre-François Moreau (Fontenay-aux-Roses: ENS Éditions, 1996). See also, in the present volume, Knox Peden's contribution and Pascale Gillot's response, both of which touch on the overlapping matter of Spinoza's theory of truth as a correspondence theory and as a coherence theory.
- 15 See Don Garrett, "Spinoza's *Conatus* Argument," in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. Olli Koistinen and John Biro (New York: Oxford, 2002).
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Yitzhak Y. Melamed, *Spinoza's Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 92. See also Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "Spinoza on

- Inherence, Causation, and Conception,” *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50, no. 3 (2012): 365–386.
- 18 See the discussion of this in Michael Della Rocca, “Rationalism run amok: Representation and the reality of emotions in Spinoza,” in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, ed. Charlie Huenemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
  - 19 But see, in the present volume, Edwin Curley’s contribution, “Spinoza’s Metaphysics Revisited,” where he advances a radically different understanding of mode in Spinoza.
  - 20 At E2p23, Spinoza writes that “the mind does not know itself, except insofar as it perceives the ideas of the affections of the body.” This means that the mind’s knowledge of itself is not immediate but is mixed with the knowledge it has of bodies. Descartes, on the other hand, held that the mind has a privileged epistemic access to itself, unmediated by bodies: the *cogito* doctrine tells us so much. See, for example, Descartes’s *Second Replies* (to Mersenne), where Descartes notes that when we say “I think, therefore I am, or I exist,” we see this by a “inspection on the part of the mind alone” [*une simple inspection de l’esprit*] [CSM II 100/AT VII 140]. The *inspectio mentis* suggests that the mind’s thinking is intuitively known by the mind. Since the mind is nothing but a *res cogitans*, therefore, the mind knows itself intuitively.
  - 21 Great thanks are due to Michael Della Rocca, Dan Garber, Steve Nadler, Alison Peterman, and Charles Ramond for their helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter.

## Spinoza's True Ideas: Suggestive Convergences

Knox Peden

It's a recurrence bordering on cliché to begin accounts of the history of Spinozism with a remark on the plurality of philosophical roles that Spinoza has taken on, from the godless heretic who scandalized seventeenth-century Dutch Jewry to the *Gottbetrunkenen Mensch* who inspired nineteenth-century German Romanticism. Politically, things aren't much clearer when one notes that the same thinker beloved of Marxists is also dear to a tradition that runs from Bismarck to Kissinger. A lot of this disparity has to do with the different intellectual, cultural, and political contexts that Spinoza has occupied. If your concern is liberalism, you think of him alongside Hobbes; if it's religion, he's placed somewhere between Maimonides and radical Protestantism; the metaphysicians regard him as either post-Cartesian or pre-Kantian, or both. The point is that Spinoza serves a variety of theoretical purposes. This is a historical fact.

But there's another historical fact that squares awkwardly with this one. Despite nearly 400 years of divergent interpretation, we can identify suggestive convergences. Perhaps this shouldn't surprise us. Whatever the discontinuities in Spinoza reception, the textual oeuvre has remained more or less continuous in its canonical determination. For example, no one disagrees whether Spinoza thinks that Substance is by nature prior to its affections, even if they disagree on what that belief means. But I think we should be surprised to find philosophers who have different commitments and who are emerging from disparate contexts producing arguments that coalesce around a set of Spinozistic ideas. And this is all the more striking when there is no genealogical explanation for the commonality. An instance of this phenomenon is the subject of this chapter, which considers the conceptual similarities between the work of two imposing twentieth-century rationalists, the French Marxist Louis Althusser and the American analytic philosopher Donald Davidson. The fulcrum of the

comparison will be occupied by the Spinozist conception of a “true idea,” which serves to illuminate both thinkers’ efforts to challenge various empiricisms without relying on a set of idealist commitments that would be anathema to materialism in Althusser’s case and naturalism in Davidson’s.<sup>1</sup>

Why is the notion of the “true idea” central in this regard? Althusser’s Spinozism is a matter of record, as is his habitual, almost talismanic invocation of Spinoza’s claim that we have true ideas (“*habemus enim ideam veram*”). Spinozism is by no means central to Davidson’s philosophical identity, though its presence has not gone unremarked, not least by Davidson himself. His doctrine of “anomalous monism” as first presented in “Mental Events” (1970) has been glossed as Spinozist insofar as it posits the ontological identity of events as discrete particulars, while maintaining that such events can be described in vocabularies—the mental and the physical—that are not reducible to one another.<sup>2</sup> Substitute Thought and Extension for “mental” and “physical” and the parity becomes clear. Davidson’s argument in “Mental Events” was not reliant on Spinoza, at least if we take Davidson at his word. But this makes his acknowledgment of its Spinozistic character all the more suggestive.<sup>3</sup> If Althusser’s Spinozism is as genealogically grounded as it is conceptually robust, stemming from work in philosophy of science going back to Jean Cavaillès and an approach to the history of philosophy developed by Martial Gueroult, Davidson’s Spinozism looks to be an instance of spontaneous emergence. To be sure, his early work was in the history of ideas and Platonism. And he once complained that exposure to Whitehead’s metaphysics set him back for years.<sup>4</sup> But the project in analytic philosophy for which Davidson is renowned was the product of a unique encounter between Quinean naturalism, decision theory, and post-Wittgensteinian inquiries into intention.<sup>5</sup> There’s no obvious place for an explicit, institutionally mediated Spinozism in this matrix.

But if we focus on Davidson’s concept of truth some contextual markers indicative of its Spinozist nature come into focus. At the heart of Davidson’s philosophy of language was an effort to take the truth conditional semantics that Alfred Tarski had formulated for formal languages and use it to track meaning in natural languages. Tarski’s efforts in logic showed that the only viable definition of truth was semantic, in the sense that the truth of a sentence is dependent on the meaning of the terms it comprises.<sup>6</sup> Canonically, we are told that “‘snow is white’ is true iff snow is white.” Many have found this disquotational approach to truth too deflationary to be of much good outside of formal languages. But for Davidson Tarski’s work pointed the way toward a theory of meaning grounded in truth.<sup>7</sup> Davidson borrowed Tarski’s structure but reversed the direction of the

mechanism. Rather than making truth consequent on the meaning of terms, Davidson argued that the meaning of our utterances is a consequence of the conditions under which they can be said to be—or not to be—true. In extending the project to natural languages, Davidson also re-embedded philosophy of language in the world. It is the unbounded world of causal determinations—something like Substance—that makes sentences true or false.

Now, Tarski was also central to Jean Cavallès's *Sur la logique et la théorie de la science* [On Logic and the Theory of Science] (1946), which aimed to develop a latter-day Spinozism equally opposed to phenomenology and logical positivism (or so I argue).<sup>8</sup> But I'm not prepared to make an argument for Tarski as the vector of twentieth-century Spinozist rationalism. My remarks here are meant primarily to suggest that the Spinozistic elements of Davidson's project are not limited to his philosophy of mind and the metaphysics it entails.<sup>9</sup> They are in fact central to his account of truth, which is the linchpin of his work.

The concept of truth was likewise central to Althusser's project in the 1960s. In *Reading Capital*, he wrote:

The first man ever to have posed the problem of *reading*, and in consequence, of *writing*, was Spinoza, and he was also the first man in the world to have proposed both a theory of history and a philosophy of the opacity of the immediate. With him, for the first time ever, a man linked together in this way the essence of reading and the essence of history in a theory of the difference between the imaginary and the true.<sup>10</sup>

Althusser's critique of humanist Marxism required developing an epistemology in which truth claims did not rely in the last instance on the empirical testimony of sensory experience, be it spontaneous or phenomenologically reduced. In his theory of the three generalities—which maps on to Spinoza's three kinds of knowledge—Althusser pursued two goals.<sup>11</sup> First, he developed a vision of conceptual thought in which knowledge is produced rather than discovered. Interpretation works not on spontaneous givens or raw data. It occupies a theoretically mediated space in which it constructs concepts that name relations that would not otherwise be discernible. Error is not so much a deviation from truth as it is an instance in which such relations are obscured. The causal mechanisms in play in such obscurity are illuminated by "true ideas." In a word, science explains the fact of ideology. Recourse to phenomenological ground explains error only to the extent that it explains it away, recasting disagreement as perspectival difference. Althusser's rationalist commitment to true ideas, to the Spinozist notion that "the true is its own sign, and that of the false," is a way



of making truth a primitive concept. When truth is occluded, it is not a matter of stupidity or a dearth of knowledge, but genuine disagreement about the world, an instance of incommensurable ideologies. For Althusser, such disagreements are political in principle, with class struggle their optimal form.

Davidson lacked Althusser's ideological commitment to Marxism. But he shared his rationalist commitment to a primitive concept of truth that would avoid the threat of skepticism he saw in Quine's reliance on "stimulus meaning" as an empirical basis for epistemology.<sup>12</sup> More, it would provide a firmer foundation for disagreement than a pragmatism that ranks utterances according to their enabling or disabling qualities rather than their property of being either true or false. Much to Richard Rorty's chagrin, Davidson insisted on the reality of this distinction, just as he insisted on the actuality of true belief as a matter of philosophical principle.<sup>13</sup>

Althusser and Davidson develop Spinozist conceptions of truth designed to navigate between the Scylla of idealist coherence and the Charybdis of empiricist correspondence. So far, I've made this claim by assertion, but my aim is to make it compelling. I want to say a few words first about the relationship between adequate and true ideas in Spinoza's philosophy, and the ways in which the distinction maps and doesn't map on to coherence and correspondence theories of truth. This is a preliminary for a discussion of the Spinozist resonances in Davidson's essay "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" (1983). In the final section, I'll argue that the motivations and results of Davidson's conception of truth align him with Althusser insofar as both remain committed to a full-throated rationalism in the face of various pragmatist temptations vying for hegemony in their respective philosophical contexts.

## I. Adequate and True Ideas

In Althusser's view, to have a true idea of an object is not to think one has discovered the phenomenological ground uniting it to a subject in a common frame. Rather it is to know the object as comprising relations that are essential to its concept. A circle is a figure drawn by a line, one end of which is fixed. Thus we have a true idea of a circle. (It's hard to conceive one for which this description does not apply, irrespective of phenomenological properties; this is the sense of a true idea being its own sign, as something like an analytic truth with the force of a synthetic one.)<sup>14</sup> Althusser sought to do something similar with the mode of production, and with the capitalist mode of production as a specific instance of this more general, yet to be constructed concept. To form a true idea of the capitalist mode

of production is to articulate the relations that are essential to its concept, most if not all of which turn on the relation of exploitation. Althusser never succeeded in this enterprise, or in his effort to find support for all his views in Marx's own writings. But his self-recriminations on this score need not affect our judgment. The rationalist motivations are still salutary; he had good ideas.

Enthusiasts for these ideas have long regretted that Althusser never devoted any sustained exegetical attention to Spinoza's philosophy in his published work that might serve to clarify his epistemology.<sup>15</sup> The digression that is included in the French edition of *L'avenir dure longtemps* is a powerful account of Spinoza's appeal and his contribution to materialist philosophy.<sup>16</sup> But its mode of presentation is consistent with the rest of this impassioned volume, which is to say that it is more stimulating than conclusive. In any event, one consequence of Spinoza's erratic place in Althusser's oeuvre is that we are never entreated to a discussion of the relationship between the adequate and the true idea in Spinoza's thought. The rationalist epistemology of Althusser's work in the 1960s results in an emphasis on the true, but there is no rigorous distinction between the "true" and the "adequate" in this writing. This is regrettable since pursuing clarity on this issue is a way to come to terms with the important relationship between science and ideology in Althusser's thought, especially since this distinction seems to have bearing on other important philosophical binaries, such as internalist/externalist or indeed coherence/correspondence. To come back to Spinoza's writing, the example of the circle seems to be a true idea that is also an adequate idea, since it's a case of an idea expressing its efficient cause. The relationship between adequate and true ideas remains a contentious issue in Spinoza literature, but it's important to get a handle on it for understanding Althusser's rationalism, as well as Davidson's.

John Morrison's argument for an "essentric interpretation"<sup>17</sup> of true ideas is illuminating in this regard. Distinguishing his reading from coherence, correspondence, and causal accounts of truth in Spinoza, he concludes with the suggestion that:

'Adequate' and 'true' are just different ways of picking out the same kind of idea, and therefore the real definition of adequate idea is the same as the real definition of true idea. [...] How do 'adequate' and 'true' pick out the relevant kind of idea? 'Adequate' picks it out by its intrinsic features, while 'true' picks it out by its extrinsic features (E2d4, E1d6, Ep. 60)<sup>18</sup>

Both involve knowledge of essence—our own essence, and that of the object known. The letter to Tschirnhaus Morrison cites makes the point in spades:

“Between a true and an adequate idea I recognize no difference but this, that the word ‘true’ has regard only to the agreement [*convenientia*] of the idea with its object [*ideatum*], whereas the word ‘adequate’ has regard to the nature of the idea itself.”

Morrison’s account is credible, but his proposal for an essentric interpretation seems a bridge too far in that it serves mainly to restate the puzzle of Spinoza’s epistemology as equivocating between (or indeed bridging) coherence and correspondence accounts. Partisans to either approach think that what’s known truly is something like what Spinoza means by essence. And here Quine’s remark that “meaning is what essence becomes when it is divorced from the object of reference and wedded to the word” seems germane.<sup>19</sup> In its recapitulation of Ep. 60, Morrison’s conclusion returns us to the suspicion that Spinoza wants to have it both ways with truth and meaning (essence). It also strengthens the intuition that the distinction between adequate and true might map, *via* the figures of the intrinsic and the extrinsic, on to the heuristic distinction between coherence (intrinsic) and correspondence (extrinsic) theories of truth.

In Spinoza’s epistemology, all adequate ideas are true ideas but it’s not clear that all true ideas are adequate ideas. An idea’s property of being true is dependent on its agreement with something extrinsic to it. It is that extrinsic thing that makes the idea true. Here, roughly, is a notion similar to what Davidson is after in truth conditional semantics (making allowances for the fact that Davidson trades in meanings, not ideas). But as E2d4 tell us: “By an adequate idea I mean an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself without relation to its object, has all the properties—that is, intrinsic characteristics (or denominations)—of a true idea.” So the definition of an adequate idea depends on that of a true idea, which is *intrinsically* defined *qua* true idea by the fact that its property of being true is *extrinsically* determined. Substance comes first in metaphysics, but truth comes first in epistemology.

As we know, Spinoza’s metaphysical project is hardly deflationary. The certainty that comes with true ideas is not a contingent feature of the world, but a necessary one. To grasp the necessity of such certainty is to form an adequate idea of the true idea. Yet such an adequate idea seems not to be an essential feature of thought; otherwise, how do we wrongly think ourselves as free, that is, able to act contrary to necessity? E2p23 tells us: “He who has a true idea knows at the same time that he has a true idea, and cannot doubt its truth.” This experience is akin to what Timothy Williamson calls a “factive mental state.”<sup>20</sup> Many mental states fit this description. The state of believing oneself free does not. We can doubt whether we are free. To be sure, we can feel and strongly

suspect that we are free. But we cannot know what such freedom is in the same way that we know what the circle is.

The knowledge that one has a true idea is itself an adequate idea. But, since it doesn't appear to be necessary, the question arises: Where does this adequacy come from? By grounding truth in causal determinations and building the intrinsic properties of the adequate idea into the array of extrinsic determinations, adequacy itself becomes nested and foundational, an expression of Substance thinking itself. Truth and adequacy relate in a kind of Möbius strip that is the basis of Spinoza's challenge to skepticism.<sup>21</sup>

To know is to know that you know. Cartesian doubt is rendered superfluous and the skeptic is shown to the door. Richard Popkin captured this view too when he said, "For Spinoza, there are no real skeptics, only ignoramuses."<sup>22</sup> You only ever have two options; you either know you know or you know you don't know. In all cases, you know. To say you don't know if you know or don't know is either to be disingenuous or to utter a malapropism. Radical skepticism is impossible, a philosophical figment, in that it falsely posits that knowledge is a matter, not of determination, but of fit. The fit is that between the reality of our experience and the tools by which we come to know said "reality," a fit that, in its very definition, could well be a misfit. The rejection of such a view was, not coincidentally, central to Davidson's broadside against what he termed the third dogma of empiricism (and inadvertently all Kantianisms) in the culmination of his John Locke Lectures at Oxford in 1970 and his presidential address to the American Philosophical Association in 1973: the essay published as "On the Very of Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (1974).<sup>23</sup>

## II. Truth and Causality

Many of Davidson's essay titles have a Spinozistic ring. "Epistemology Externalized" (1990) sounds like Substance; "Reality without Reference" (1977) seems to capture the parallelism thesis; and "Three Varieties of Knowledge" (1991) sounds like it might align with Spinoza's three kinds of knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Here I want to focus on "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" (1983), in which Davidson seeks to develop the thesis that "coherence yields correspondence."<sup>25</sup> To recode this Spinozistically, "adequacy yields truth." It is in this essay that Davidson tells us that truth is primitive, leading to the gnomic pronouncement: "The question 'how do I know my beliefs are generally true?' thus answers itself, simply because beliefs are by nature generally true."<sup>26</sup> This is also the essay in

which he rejects Quine's "epistemic intermediaries," the sensory stimulations that result from the totality of physical events our embodied existence comprises. Importantly, Davidson grants that there are causal intermediaries that play an epistemological role. Your slamming the door on my hand will cause me to know that it hurts. But to base epistemology in the senses is to reopen the door to skepticism by making it possible, if not entirely plausible, that such senses just might not be well calibrated with the world. Davidson's alternative amounts to a rejection of the idea that there is a kind of ontological frontier to be crossed each time a physical event becomes known, a position Spinoza rejects in E2p7 and that Althusser criticizes at length in the closing passages of his section of *Reading Capital*.<sup>27</sup> If meaning is public, it's because its causes are as well.<sup>28</sup>

Davidson also thinks Quine errs to the extent that he describes meaning as something to be accessed, rather than an effect or consequence. "Trying to make meaning accessible has made truth inaccessible."<sup>29</sup> The bulk of the essay develops Davidson's arguments against the possibility of massive error in our conception of the world:

What stands in the way of global skepticism of the senses is, in my view, the fact that we must, in the plainest and methodologically most basic cases, take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief. And what we, as interpreters, must take them to be is what they in fact are. Communication begins where causes converge: your utterance means what mine does if belief in its truth is systematically caused by the same events and objects.<sup>30</sup>

This passage invokes a lot of Davidsonian themes, not least the principle of charity. But the theme I want to exploit is that of causality. Common cause is what neutralizes skepticism. And this notion of the common is infinite and exhaustive. Most holistic accounts of meaning run into the problem of determining relevant "wholes" or contexts which shape a given set of propositions or ideas. But Davidson realizes that there is no way to determine, prior to interpretation, what the boundaries of the common world would or could be, in a temporal or physical sense. And if there's no way to determine such bounds semantically or epistemologically, then there are no ontological bounds to its causal networks either. Conventions can't be foundational for language and hence meaning since their bounded, finite nature as discrete systems is always in some sense illusory; causal determination renders the putative borders of conventions remarkably porous.<sup>31</sup>

This is also the gravamen of Spinoza's metaphysics. The "common notions," which might too readily appear like so many conventions (agreements; *convenientia* in the sense that true ideas are agreements) are an epistemological

cipher for infinite Substance, an adequate idea of which tells us that there is no other way to know the true except *via* the true. This is the metaphysical sense in which “coherence yields correspondence,” even if, in the epistemological order of things, correspondence gives rise to coherence. *Deus sive Natura* is the name for a singular, immanent cause for Spinoza. Substance brokers no outside, no exteriority to the causal framework that could introduce a level of inscrutability in principle. Nothing is locked away, needing to be accessed. The entirety of Substance is out in the open. But even to speak this way—of exposure, out in the open—is to maintain the idea of an alternative, an area that is closed or otherwise obscure. This is what both Davidson and Spinoza reject in their theories of truth. As does Althusser in his rejection of any philosophical or political project that would seek to ground the truth of its claims in the phenomenon of revelation (bringing the outside in, making the heretofore closed open, permitting light into a world shrouded in darkness).

### III. Rationalism contra Pragmatism

What are the upshots of these comparisons I've been running? First, it seems to me that, depending on how robustly one can establish the conceptual links between Spinoza, Althusser, and Davidson, striking metaphilosophical and metahistorical implications could result. The typical move in intellectual history is to explain conceptual parity by appeal to genealogical convergence, alighting on a moment of common ancestry. Now, this has a Davidsonian appeal; communication begins, after all, where causes converge. But, given the empirical absence of genealogical convergence, it seems more important to consider the significance of a Spinozism that is provoked into existence in otherwise disparate, unconnected contexts, and to ponder what this tells us about the place of proper names, -isms, and other conceptual groupings that make up the history of philosophy. If something recognizable as a Spinozist position does work in unrelated research programs—structural Marxism; analytic philosophy of language—what does this tell us about the historical character of Spinoza's ideas? Does Spinozism resurface because its propositions are mutable? Or is their staying power a consequence of their being in fact immutable, with reformulations of the same problem emerging in unrelated contexts? These are open questions generated by the conceptual similarities I've sought to demonstrate.<sup>32</sup>

More locally, I think we can see in Althusser and Davidson a commitment to defend rationalism against pragmatist encroachments. In Althusser's case, it's worth considering what Michel Foucault does with many of his ideas.

Foucault's critiques of ideology in the 1970s in the name of power/knowledge amount to a rejection of the Spinozist basis of Althusser's theory, which served as a metaphysical warrant for truth claims grounded in an understanding of the mode of production and its relationship to class struggle.<sup>33</sup> The result for Foucault is a more flexible conception of political contestation and genealogical suspicion of all forms of truth and knowledge, in a word: pragmatism. But it seems significant that Foucault's political judgment becomes, in a sense, unmoored in this period; witness the flirtations with neoliberalism, Iran, etc. A rudderless ship cannot trust its bearings. Political judgments that forfeit truth claims are similarly adrift. Althusser's commitment to Marxism, and more particularly the French Communist Party, led him to a series of seemingly intractable positions in his later career.<sup>34</sup> But with the benefit of hindsight his commitment to the need for a rationalist component to Marxist political thought and struggle seems salutary. If neoliberalism wants to trade in "post-truth," Marxism may be forced to continue to struggle with it on that ideological terrain. Yet it can only do so if it is buttressed and sustained by the truth claims that serve as its most essential motivation, truth claims grounded in a rational, causal understanding of the historically ramified structure of the mode of production and the actions of class struggle.

Davidson's worries over the political effects of cultural relativism and his rebuffs to Rorty speak to commitments similar to Althusser's in the face of Foucault's challenges. In an interview with one of his former students, Ernie Lepore, Davidson criticized notions that understanding across cultures requires a kind of leap or imagination that bridges otherwise incommensurable schemes: "If we think of understanding as needing some magical leap of the imagination, we're no longer calling on ourselves to discover the common ground on which we can make whatever sense we can make of one another."<sup>35</sup> Many would suspect the more nefarious tones of cultural imperialism than relativism in this comment. But the key point is the reference to common ground as something that is not given, but that is to be discovered. This reference to discovery points toward the many efforts to bridge Davidson's epistemology with Gadamer's hermeneutics.<sup>36</sup> Gadamer thought all meaning was grounded in the transmission of tradition and the negotiation between such traditions in the encounter between horizons. Meaning is discovered in the interstices. Gadamer and Davidson's own attempt at dialogue failed to be fruitful, and most commentators point to Davidson's inability to grasp the full measure of Gadamer's position.<sup>37</sup> But the misalignment between Gadamer and Davidson is not accidental in my view, and not necessarily in Gadamer's favor. Davidson may speak of discovering common ground,

but the substance of his own work suggests that such epistemological ground is not so much discovered as constructed out of a common network of causal determinations. Such ground is not latent, intelligible to the “myth of origins.” The common ground is rather *produced* through the combination of causes and knowing, informed actions themselves. This is much closer to Althusser’s own difficult account of the relationship between the “real object” and the “object of knowledge” in *Reading Capital*, which targeted phenomenological and hermeneutic conceptions of ground.<sup>38</sup> More important, this is the general ethos of the French epistemological tradition to which Althusser belongs. Davidson is concerned with the relationship between knowledge and action, with how what we come to know shapes what we come to do—and vice versa. In this quest he hangs on to the central notion of truth because without it there is no sense to be made of the following evident fact, which also happens to be the *sine qua non* of political engagement: that we inhabit a world that is at once infinite and common.

More evocative still is the place that Davidson occupies in efforts to develop an analytic pragmatism championed by Robert Brandom and John McDowell. Consider the place of “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge” in McDowell’s *Mind and World*, where it is a fount that comes to serve as a foil (not unlike Althusser’s materialist account of ideology will do for Foucault’s pragmatics).<sup>39</sup> In a word, Davidson plays the Spinoza to the Pittsburgh Kantians and Hegelians. He offers a rationalism that seems in the end to be untenable because it does not allow us to lend credence to many of our most basic binary intuitions, for example between subjective and objective or spontaneity and receptivity. Central to McDowell’s account in *Mind and World* is a rehabilitation of the hermeneutic and specifically Gadamerian idea of language as tradition, as a tradition, that is, into which one must be initiated before one can make one’s way in the world. Such a tradition is a kind of “second nature,” which allows us an alternative to the strictly delimited spheres of a logical space of reasons, governed by norms, and a logical space of nature (the Sellarsian gloss that McDowell gives to the domain described by natural science).<sup>40</sup>

This mediating regime is essential in McDowell’s vision, and accounts for his disparagement of Davidson’s idea that language is at best (or at most) a shared convention, a kind of short cut that allows rational creatures to communicate rather than an essential, one is tempted to say ontologically distinct element of that communication. As McDowell glosses Davidson’s point: “The ‘shared language’ is no more than an aid in a cognitive performance that could be undertaken without it; the capacity for mutual understanding needs no



philosophically interesting background.”<sup>41</sup> Davidson’s critique of language as a mediating frontier was part and parcel of his attack on the “third dogma of empiricism,” the idea that knowledge of the world devolves from a relationship between a conceptual scheme and the empirical content it allows. As McDowell acknowledges, this was Davidson’s own version of Sellars’s challenge to “the Myth of the Given” that subtends all empiricism and phenomenology. Odd, then, to see McDowell suggest that “the idea that this cognitive equipment needs no such background is just another outcropping of Givenness.” McDowell then describes Sellars’s alternative to Davidson as “Kant-inspired” and promotes his own as follows: “To put it in Hegelian terms, Givenness is not unrevisability as such, but a supposed unrevisability that reflects absence of mediation from our picture; and Davidson renounces the only available mediation for the capacity of human beings to understand each other.”<sup>42</sup>

*Renouncing mediation*—a better slogan for Spinozism would be hard to come by. McDowell shares the fears of many skeptics of Spinozism that to have done with mediation is to collapse either into a “bald naturalism” of pure determination or an undifferentiated morass of inscrutable ontological expression. (Caricatures of Deleuze often evoke the latter option.) But again it is Althusser who teaches us that to have done with mediation is to be done with the fiction of a *frontier* that sustains all empiricism and specifically phenomenological rationalism. In his defense of Marx’s transition from Volume 1 to Volume 3 as a matter of remaining within the concept rather than transgressing the frontier into the concrete, Althusser is clear: “This frontier is impassable in principle because it cannot be a frontier, because there is no common homogeneous space (mental or real) between the abstract of the concept of a thing and the empirical concrete of this thing which could justify the use of the concept of a frontier.”<sup>43</sup> *Nota bene* that Althusser does not deny the existence of common, homogeneous space *tout court*; such is indeed the domain of the physical, Spinoza’s Extension. What he denies is that there is a common, mediating space between Thought and Extension, a site that is neither material nor ideal at which they nevertheless connect. Likewise, the metaphysics emergent from Davidson’s account of “Mental Events” denies any interaction between the domain of the mental and physical, not because they don’t touch, but simply because they are the same substance, described in two different vocabularies. In Spinoza’s terms, they are the same substance expressed in two different attributes.

Rationality, in both Davidson’s and Althusser’s visions, eschews discreteness. It refuses to be located in specific subjects or individuals modeled on the figures sustained by humanist ideology. McDowell cannot accept Davidson’s

rationalism for the same reason Kant cannot accept Spinoza's, or for that matter Foucault cannot accept Althusser's. It purports to know things about what it means to know without tethering such knowledge to the discrete needs and desires of embodied individuals. The rationalism is thorough-going and in a sense overwhelming. A generation's rejection of Althusser was predicated on the idea that his epistemic confidence was metaphysically untenable and politically unsavory. Several decades on, his confidence appears to be a virtue. Critiques of Davidson tend to suggest that his rationalism cannot work in the end because it cannot account for a host of persistent intuitions, not least that there must be more to meaning than truth conditions and externalist determinations. "We connive with our language to make it, and us, seem special," Davidson wrote.<sup>44</sup> Our intuition suggests that rationalist materialism is insufficient. But intuitions were always knowledge of the lowest sort for Spinoza. They may be yet.

## Notes

- 1 For a moment I thought I was the first to discover this similarity. But see Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), in which it is claimed that Davidson's breakup of "the Cartesian circle of epistemology" with a semantic theory of truth "is a gesture strictly homologous to that of Louis Althusser" (226n24).
- 2 Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 103–104. "Mental Events" [1970] appears in Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
- 3 Compare Donald Davidson, "Spinoza's Causal Theory of the Affects" [1993], in *Truth, Language, and History* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon, 2005).
- 4 Donald Davidson, "Intellectual Autobiography of Donald Davidson," in *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Lewis Edwin Hahn (LaSalle: Open Court, 1999).
- 5 Joel Isaac, "Donald Davidson and the Analytic Revolution in American Philosophy, 1940–1970," *The Historical Journal* 56, no. 3 (2013): 757–779.
- 6 Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages" [1936], in Alfred Tarski, *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics*, ed. John Corcoran, trans. J. H. Woodger, 2nd edn (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1983). Tarski produced a less technically exigent version of his views in "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4, no. 3 (1944): 341–376. Davidson once remarked that "he got through graduate school by reading Feigl and Sellars" (*Essays on Actions and Events*, 261).
- 7 Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

- 8 Knox Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology: French Rationalism from Cavaillès to Deleuze* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014).
- 9 For an account of these elements, see Knox Peden, "Donald Davidson's 'Spinozistic Extravagance,'" *Critical Horizons* 18, no. 4 (2017): 347–358.
- 10 Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2016), 14–15.
- 11 Louis Althusser, "On the Materialist Dialectic" [1963], in Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005).
- 12 W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).
- 13 Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth" [1986], in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 14 See Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza 1: Dieu* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968), 170ff. See also Ep. 60 to Tschirnhaus.
- 15 Critics also regret that Althusser's relationship to Spinoza was not more "philologically explicit." See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1979), 64.
- 16 See Louis Althusser, *L'avenir dure longtemps*, suivi de *Les faits* [1992] (Paris: Flammarion, 2013), translated as "The Only Materialist Tradition, Part 1: Spinoza," in *The New Spinoza*, ed. Warren Montag and Ted Stolze (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).
- 17 "Stated roughly, my proposal is that it is definitive of true ideas that they represent essences and are derived in the right kind of way by the intellect from an innate idea of one's own essence. I will call this the 'essentric interpretation,' because of the central role of essences." See John Morrison, "Truth in the *Emendation*," in *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 66.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 91.
- 19 W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" [1951], in *From a Logical Point of View*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 22.
- 20 Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): "The main idea is simple. A propositional attitude is factive if and only if, necessarily, one has it only to truths" (34).
- 21 See E2p43d: "Let us suppose, then, that there is in God, in so far as he explicated through the nature of the human mind, an adequate idea, A. The idea of this idea must also necessarily be in God, and is related to God in the same way as the idea A (by E2p20, the proof being of general application). But by our supposition the idea A is related to God in so far as he is explicated through the nature of the human mind. Therefore the idea of the idea A must be related to God in the same way; that is (by E2p11c), this adequate idea of the idea A will be in the mind which has the adequate idea A. *So he who has an adequate idea, that is, he who knows a*

thing truly (by E2p34) must at the same time have an adequate idea—that is, a true knowledge—of his knowledge; that is, (as is self-evident) he is bound at the same time to be certain” (emphasis added).

- 22 Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 251.
- 23 In Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*.
- 24 More shocking is the fact that it does, except Davidson's third variety of knowledge amounts to knowledge of other people's minds rather than “singular essences.” But since such knowledge derives from an array of essentially common causal determinations that converge in discrete mental events, a case could be made that it's not unlike Spinoza's knowledge of singular essences as involving knowledge of their causal dependence. See Donald Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
- 25 Ibid., 137–157.
- 26 Ibid., 153.
- 27 Althusser et al., *Reading Capital*, 337–349. E2p7 states: “The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things.”
- 28 See Quine and Davidson's exchange on this subject in Lewis Edwin Hahn, *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (LaSalle: Open Court, 1999), 73–86. For a spirited defense of the Quinean position, see Gary Kemp, *Quine versus Davidson: Truth, Reference, and Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 29 Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, 145.
- 30 Ibid., 151.
- 31 Compare Davidson's “Communication and Convention” (1993) in Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*.
- 32 Open, but not necessarily new, questions. A modern classic is *Philosophy in History: Essays on the Historiography of Philosophy*, ed. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). More recent inquiries are collected in *Philosophy and Its History: Aims and Methods of Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Mogens Lærke, Justin E. H. Smith, and Eric Schliesser (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- 33 See Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1970–71*, ed. Daniel Defert et al. (New York: Picador, 2014), 24–27. Compare Jacques Bouveresse, *Nietzsche contre Foucault: Sur la vérité, la connaissance et le pouvoir* (Paris: Agora, 2016). The dialogue with Althusser runs throughout Foucault's lectures from this period, culminating in the publication of *Surveiller et punir* in 1975. For more on this relation see Knox Peden, “Truth and Consequences: Political Judgment and Historical Knowledge in Foucault and Althusser,” *ZINBUN: Annals of the Institute for Research in the Humanities*, Kyoto University 47 (2017): 33–47.

- 34 See “Marx in His Limits,” in Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978–1987*, ed. Oliver Corpet and François Matheron, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2006), as well as “What Must Change in the Party,” trans. Patrick Camiller, *New Left Review* 109 (1978): 19–45.
- 35 “An interview with Donald Davidson,” unpublished interview transcript, 22. Available online: [http://rucss.rutgers.edu/images/personal-ernest-lepore/Davidson\\_interview.pdf](http://rucss.rutgers.edu/images/personal-ernest-lepore/Davidson_interview.pdf). An abbreviated version is included as an appendix in Donald Davidson, *Problems of Rationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 36 See *Dialogues with Davidson*, ed. Jeff Malpas (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).
- 37 See, for example, Kristin Gjesdal, “Davidson and Gadamer on Plato’s Dialectical Ethics,” in *Interpretation: Ways of Thinking about the Sciences and the Arts*, ed. Peter K. Machamer and Gereon Wolters (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).
- 38 Althusser et al., *Reading Capital*, 34–62. See Peden, *Spinoza Contra Phenomenology*, 157–164.
- 39 John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), especially 129–161. Compare Robert B. Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representation, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- 40 Ibid., xx.
- 41 Ibid., 185.
- 42 Ibid., 186.
- 43 Althusser et al., *Reading Capital*, 346.
- 44 Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, 96.

# A Response: Althusser, Spinoza, and the Specter of the Cartesian Subject

Pascale Gillot

Knox Peden's contribution, centered on the Spinozist conception of the *true idea*, effectively defines the role that Spinoza, and Spinozist rationalism in particular, can play in contemporary philosophy. More specifically, his analysis highlights the richness of the resources afforded by Spinoza, insofar as the study of a certain contemporary reactivation of the Spinozist conception of truth makes it possible to put into perspective often artificially opposed traditions in the twentieth century, namely, "Continental philosophy" on the one hand, and "analytic philosophy" on the other.

For Peden, it is necessary to understand how the twentieth-century revival of Spinozist epistemology often manifested itself as a kind of integral rationalism, a rationalism of a particular type that is irreducible to either naturalism or idealism. It turns out that a possible meeting point between the continental tradition and the analytic tradition is afforded by the re-reading of the Spinozist conception of the true idea as an adequate idea. Peden cites two authors as having been essential to this re-reading: first, Louis Althusser; and second, Donald Davidson. More fundamentally, Peden's description of a "suggestive convergence" onto Spinozism by these two philosophers reveals fissures where we would not necessarily expect them, in this case within each of these traditions.

In the case of Althusser, his anti-idealist rationalism, according to Peden, makes use of the Spinozist theory of truth as *adaequatio* and *convenientia* as a means of barring the attempt to ground an extrinsic criterion of truth—an unusual approach that leads Spinoza to define the truth as *index sui et falsi*. Under these conditions, the break between truth and falsity takes place independently

of the judgment of a knowing subject, since knowledge, the procession of our ideas, is conceived as being a form of production rather than of representation, namely, rather than as belonging to a knowing subject who would measure the truth-value of his own ideas/representations. Althusser mobilizes this Spinozistic conception of truth and its distinction from falsity to oppose the idealism of theories of the knowing subject (rooted in the Cartesian tradition) as well as the empiricist-positivist tradition. As for Donald Davidson, whose work is defined by its positing an anti-naturalist epistemology, he deploys an “*index sui*” conception of truth in order to resist an empiricist trend periodically felt in the field of analytic philosophy—a trend embodied by the naturalized epistemology of Quine.

It is worth reiterating, then, that if, for Peden, the analytic philosophy of Davidson and the Continental philosophy of Althusser can be said to converge in their appreciation, Spinoza is nevertheless employed by these authors differentially and strategically, as a means of addressing fault lines that exist within their own traditions. On the side of analytic philosophy, this fault line pits Davidson’s concept of truth against Quine’s (positivist) naturalism. On the side of Continental philosophy, the fundamental partition divides an Althusserian standpoint influenced by Spinoza, itself encompassing both the affirmation of the primacy of the true idea in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (to recall the celebrated formula “*habemus enim ideam veram*,” “we have, in fact, a true idea”) and the conception of truth as *norma sui* in the *Ethics*,<sup>1</sup> from a “Cartesian-Husserlian” standpoint which indexes the theory of truth to a theory of the knowing (or judging) subject: the Cartesian veridical subject, endowed with the faculty of discriminating between clear and distinct ideas, and obscure and confused ideas.

These references to Spinoza thus focus on his theory of truth and on his rationalism, which involve a remarkable interplay of the *correspondence* or *convenientia* model—in which, for true ideas, the relation to the object is extrinsic—and the *coherence* or *adaequatio* model, in which the relationship to the object is intrinsic, the true idea being defined here as “adequate idea.”

Recall that the model of correspondence is posited axiomatically at E1a6 in a concise statement: “A true idea must agree with its object [*idea vera debet cum suo ideato convenire*].”<sup>2</sup> As for the model of coherence, Spinoza defines “adequate ideas” at E2d4: “By adequate idea [*idea adaequata*], I understand an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself, without relation to the object [*sine relatione ad objectum*], has all the properties, or intrinsic denominations [*denominationes intrinsecae*] of a true idea [*idea vera*].”<sup>3</sup>

For Spinoza, correspondence (the notion that the true idea is extrinsic and derived from the object) and coherence (the idea that the true idea is the adequate idea, and that its veracity is derived from an intrinsic criterion independent of any reference to the object) are not two contradictory models of truth, but rather are two different ways of construing the true idea, considered as such or as referring to something else, following the logic of alternation, that is to say, according to the good old Spinozist terminology, “parallelism” (as described at E2p7). We must, therefore, be wary of taking the exposition at E2d4 purely at face value: “I say intrinsic to exclude what is extrinsic [*extrinseca*], namely, the agreement [*convenientia*] of the idea with its object.”<sup>4</sup>

The exclusion in the abovementioned passage cannot be understood as a contradiction between two regimes of truth, one coherent, and the other correspondent, since, fundamentally, the true idea and the adequate idea are one and the same—that is to say, the same idea, considered sometimes in one way (the idea as an idea, or as wholly intrinsic), sometimes in another (the relation of correspondence between the idea and its referent). Moreover, if the adequacy of the true idea with its object is axiomatic in the *Ethics*, it is because the correspondence of the true idea with its object [*ideatum*] is necessarily and immediately given by virtue of the truth of the idea itself. This correspondence need not be guaranteed by any mediation besides that provided by the idea, as would be the case, for instance, with regard to its eventual representative power, which a knowing-subject could measure independently of the formal being of the idea.

In a certain way, we could even say that, for Spinoza, coherence is the *basis* of correspondence. For although his epistemology excludes any kind of “representationalism”—an idea’s truth not residing in its supposed function as an “image” of the object, but rather in its adequation—still, the referential function of true ideas is posed as necessary. Axiomatically, a true idea *must* agree with that of which it is the idea, there is no need to demonstrate this. The referential function of the clear and distinct idea is, for Spinoza, never called into question. It does not constitute by itself a problem whose resolution could only be acquired by passing through a specific theory of knowledge: this is what separates Spinozist epistemology from the Cartesian epistemological edifice, based as it is on a theory of self-certainty.<sup>5</sup>

By examining the Spinozist theory of truth through a contemporary lens, it is thus possible for us to strategically show the secret affinity between two seemingly distinct schools of philosophical thought—that of a French epistemological tradition running through Cavailles, Bachelard, Canguilhem, and here represented by Althusser, and that of analytic philosophy, here



represented by Donald Davidson's coherent epistemology, an epistemology based on the principle that "coherence yields to correspondence."<sup>6</sup>

This is what Peden shows us: how, by deploying the Spinozist theory of truth, the two abovementioned schools of thought are able to avoid lapsing into either empiricism (the naturalized epistemology of Quine, the myth of the given, positivism) or idealism (the metaphysical representation of a subject of truth). Thus for Davidson, truth comes first, and does not derive from meaning or signification. The same can be said of Althusser. Yet both thinkers also share in the same conundrum: How does one remain rationalist while resisting the seductions of speculative idealism and the allure of the Cartesian subject? This is the central dilemma of Peden's text.

Since the analytic aspect of this analysis has been thoroughly treated by Peden in his contribution, I would like to focus more on French philosophy in my comments, and in particular on how Althusser's view of truth channels Spinoza. The role of Spinozist rationalism appears to be fundamental to Althusserian epistemology, not only in the passages of *Lire le Capital* mentioned by Peden, but also, it seems to me, in two other texts not mentioned in his essay.

The first of these texts is Althusser's *The Elements of Self-Criticism*. Particularly important to my treatment is Chapter 4, titled "On Spinoza,"<sup>7</sup> in which Spinoza is presented by Althusser as the first philosopher to make *the epistemological break* between science and ideology. The second text is the second of the lectures that Althusser gave in his 1963–4 seminar devoted to the question of psychoanalysis and the human sciences, a lecture in which Althusser explicitly opposes the Spinozist model of the mind to that of the Cartesian subject-of-truth.<sup>8</sup>

In both of these texts, Spinoza is identified by Althusser as the anti-Cartesian philosopher par excellence, able to counter the tradition of a theory of knowledge subordinated to the idealistic representations of a knowing subject. Thus in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza, with the model of knowledge as production, propounds the autonomy of adequate ideas which can themselves encompass both affirmation and negation, ultimately proposing a singular theory of truth in which the truth encompasses both itself and the false [*verum index sui et falsi*]<sup>9</sup>—in other words, a theory of truth *without a veridical subject*, and a theory of knowledge as a "process without a subject" *avant la lettre*.<sup>9</sup> Althusser's use of Spinoza makes it possible to maintain a rationalist theory of knowledge, by positing the primacy of truth (since truth is of the register of the always-already), yet not dependent on a Cartesian knowing-subject, supplemented by the certainty metaphysically provided by God, who can guarantee the passage from the clear and distinct idea to the *true* idea. It turns out that the whole of

this Cartesian edifice, involving as it does the interplay of doubt and certainty, can be short-circuited by the Spinozist conception of knowledge as production; knowledge emancipated from the jurisdiction of the veridical subject. This last point is particularly developed in the second lecture of Althusser's 1963–4 seminar, *Psychoanalysis and Human Sciences*.

To this end, I would like to focus on the illustrative figure used by Peden in his chapter, that of the "Möbius strip." The importance of the Möbius strip to the work of Lacan is well documented. It also plays a crucial role in Althusser's paper, "Psychoanalysis and Human Sciences."

The Möbius strip there suggests the structurally entangled character, in Spinozist epistemology, of *adaequatio* (the intrinsic) and *convenientia* (the extrinsic). Far from problematizing the notion of Spinoza as a coherentist, the inseparability of these two terms in fact *affirms* the totalizing character of the intrinsic criteria of truth [*adaequatio*], effectively emancipating rationalist epistemology from the idealist problematic of the subject of truth. It appears that, for Spinoza, correspondence (the referencing of the idea to an external object) and coherence (the intrinsically determined idea, encompassing both its affirmation and negation<sup>10</sup>) are inextricable. Correspondence is necessarily linked to coherence, to the extent that correspondence, for Spinoza, can be guaranteed by a subject overlooking the procession of adequate ideas. It is the nature of ideas as adequate ideas which are not the ideas or representations of a knowing subject to be able to impose themselves as *things*, rather than as *images*.

In other words, the break between truth and falsity takes place *within the field of knowledge*, independently of any act of judgment—this how Spinoza is able to upend of the question of certainty. The standpoint of the Cartesian subject is expressly rejected by Spinoza, as is any representational conception of how knowledge works. It is in this vein, echoing the "*habemus enim ideam veram*" of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, that we can understand E2p43: "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."<sup>11</sup>

This proposition, which points the way to the (non-Cartesian) definition of truth as its own norm,<sup>12</sup> suggests the reciprocity of the true idea and the adequate idea within the rationalistic perspective of the *Ethics*. It is due to Spinoza's characterization of truth as *norma sui* that the question of *convenientia* or the correspondence between an idea and its object appears to Spinoza as a false problem. The true/false distinction is not abolished, but emancipated from a theory of judgment, insofar as, according to the very terms of the *Ethics*, the "norm of truth" is none other than the true idea. The intrinsic and extrinsic criteria of

truth cannot be separated from one another, in the same way that, on a Möbius strip, the inner and outer edges cannot be distinguished. This inseparability is clearly grasped by Althusser when he examines the epistemological implications of what he calls Spinoza's "resolute anti-Cartesianism."

Given this, it's hard for me to abide by Peden's claim that Althusser, taking up Spinoza's non-idealist rationalism (a non-Cartesian rationalism, deindexed from the subject of truth), would fail to make the "distinction" between the true and the adequate. For it is precisely the entanglement between coherence and correspondence—as is clear from Spinoza's astonishing definition of the adequate idea as containing all the intrinsic denominations of the true idea, at E2d4—that grounds the non-idealistic character of Spinoza's rationalism. This is the entanglement or lack of "style" that Althusser discerns and makes his own, especially when he suggests that his own re-reading is intended as a tribute to the Spinozist theory of knowledge as production, a process without a subject, and to the Spinozist theory of truth as the criterion of both truth and falsity—thereby, in effect, evicting the Cartesian subject from his philosophy.

We can see, from the above, that the question of the break between truth and falsity is a fundamental point of disagreement between Spinoza and Descartes. And in the hands of Althusser, Spinoza's thematization of the immanent nature of this break allows Althusser to maintain the categories of truth and falsity, opposing relativism while nevertheless rejecting the idealistic hypothesis of a subject of truth.

How can rationalism be saved? This is the dilemma explored with respect to Spinoza in Peden's article—one that evinces skepticism toward fashionable postmodernist relativism, charged as it is with dispensing with the category of truth.

In this respect, it is probably not irrelevant that Michel Foucault, at the time of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, specifically directed his criticisms against the "epistemological" conception of the history of science, a conception subscribed to by Bachelard, Canguilhem, and other theorists of the "epistemological break" between science and ideology, among them Althusser himself. According to Foucault, the *epistemological history of science* is based on the science/imaginary distinction, which itself derives its force from a number of other binary distinctions (truth/error, rational/irrational, scientific/non-scientific). This historical analysis seeks to show

how a science was established over and against a pre-scientific level, which both paved the way and resisted it in advance, how it succeeded in overcoming the obstacles and limitations that still stood in its way. Bachelard and Canguilhem have provided models of this kind of history [...] since it shows what the science has freed itself from, everything that it has had to leave behind in its

progress towards the threshold of scientificity. Consequently, this description takes as its norm the fully constituted science; the history that it recounts is necessarily concerned with the opposition of truth and error, the rational and the irrational, the obstacle and fecundity, purity and impurity, the scientific and the nonscientific.<sup>13</sup>

Far from the rationalistic distinction between science and ideology, there is another type of historical analysis—that of the *archeology* of knowledge, advocated by Foucault. This type of analysis differs from the previous one (the epistemological analysis of Bachelard-Canguilhem) insofar as it aims at resituating such a scientific configuration *in the discursive practice which pervades it* and to which it belongs. This archeological analysis is capable of de-absolutizing, one might say, the Bachelardian distinction between science and the imaginary, between science and non-science, between truth and error, by employing the (Foucauldian) postulate of an absence of radical discontinuity between knowledge and science. This explains why it is *knowledge* in its transversality (from scientific to fictional, from literary to legal, from institutions to political strategies) which archaeology aspires to and not science as such, which is reassigned to the more general order of the episteme and discursive practices.

What was untenable to Foucault in the Bachelardian rationalist epistemology was fundamentally that it maintained the categories of truth and error, as well as the notion of a break, characteristic of rationalist thought in general, between truth and error.

Contrary to this Foucauldian perspective as well as to Rorty's "relativist pragmatism," which is influenced by Foucault and which Peden opposes at the end of his contribution, Althusser manages to *retain the rationalism* criticized by Foucault—a rationalism rooted in the Bachelardian thematization of the "break" between the true and the false—while simultaneously avoiding the positing of an idealist Cartesian subject that can guarantee the distinction between truth and error. One measures in this way the importance of Spinoza's strategic detour as well as the novelty of Spinozistic conception of truth as a norm of itself, instituted by means of the intrication of coherence and correspondence, radically liberated from the Cartesian notion of a subject of truth. To this degree, Spinoza very well does constitute the means to save rationalism and escape the postmodern sirens of relativism. He does this within the framework of what we can call an anti-subjective materialism, which itself is implicated by his affirmation of the primacy of thought (the automatic process of truth as the necessary interlocking of adequate ideas) over and above any "knowing" subject.

## Notes

- 1 E2p43s.
- 2 E1a6.
- 3 E2d4.
- 4 E2d4ex.
- 5 On this point of disagreement between Spinoza and Descartes, cf. E2p49s.
- 6 Cf. Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" [1983], in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
- 7 See Louis Althusser, "Elements of Self-Criticism: On Spinoza," in Louis Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: New Left Books, 1976).
- 8 See Louis Althusser, *Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences (1963–64)*, trans. Steven Rendall, foreword Pascale Gillot, pref. Olivier Corpet, and François Matheron (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).
- 9 See also E2p48s and E2p49.
- 10 Cf. in this respect E2p49.
- 11 E2p43.
- 12 E2p43s.
- 13 Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London: Tavistock, 1972), esp. 146–149.

# Spinoza on Beings of Reason [*Entia Rationis*] and the Analogical Imagination

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## Introduction

In the Preface to Part 4 of the *Ethics*, Spinoza writes, “As far as good and evil are concerned, they indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking [*cogitandi modus*] [...] But though this is so, still we must retain these words” [G II 208]. It is particularly puzzling that in a treatise whose goal is to discover the highest good in human life Spinoza casts doubt on the most basic terms of this pursuit. I propose to explore the metaphysical and epistemological basis of this purported solution in more detail through an examination of a related set of terms, including “beings of reason [*entia rationis*],” “beings of the imagination [*entia imaginationis*],” and “fictitious ideas.” In an appendix to his classic work on Spinoza, Martial Gueroult pointed out that primary among the functions of “beings of reason” is to regulate our conduct.<sup>1</sup> But, since they do not represent anything real and are not rational ideas but assemblages of the imagination, how exactly do they serve this function?

These terms are discussed and defined in early texts, including the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*,<sup>2</sup> the *Short Treatise*,<sup>3</sup> and the *Metaphysical Thoughts*.<sup>4</sup> These texts are significant for many reasons, but in part because they show the formation of Spinoza’s system through his critical engagement with his contemporaries.<sup>5</sup> Although Spinoza rejects some of the key metaphysical distinctions that underlie the late scholastic account—in particular the distinction between “real being” and “being of reason”<sup>6</sup>—and the number of overt references to this terminology drop precipitously in the *Ethics*, I think that the notion of “being of reason” persists in Spinoza’s project in other forms. Indeed, it helps us make sense of some of the most puzzling claims that we

encounter, such as claims that value terms have no reference to really existing things yet remain useful.

Even as scholars have noted the regulative role of *entia rationis*, fewer have actually specified the mechanism that explains *how* they can play this role. In a recent article, Karolina Hübner has argued that beings of reason are among those entities, like universals, that are “constructed” by the intellect in some way.<sup>7</sup> What I want to do in this chapter is specify the nature of the construction. I shall argue that Spinoza borrows from Suarez the idea that beings of reason are *analogical*. In Spinoza there is a double analogy at work. First, there is the analogy established between the model and its examples. Second, there is the analogy between the model and the natural world. The regulatory function of beings of reason depends upon the possibility of the *similarity* of the imaginative entity to an actual being. Thus, contrary to the claims of scholars like Tad Schmaltz<sup>8</sup> and Gilles Deleuze,<sup>9</sup> Spinoza has not completely eliminated analogous relations from either his metaphysics or his epistemology. Indeed, I shall claim that the case of beings of reason sheds light on the nature of the imagination itself in the *Ethics*. In particular, I want to show how the structure of an imaginative object depends on the kinds of analogy that we find in the structure of a “being of reason.”

## I. Beings of Reason and the Metaphysics of Analogy

The metaphysical status of “beings of reason” was a topic of debate long before Spinoza, and he is certainly aware of at least some of these disputes. The most important passage on this topic can be found at the very beginning of the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, which he appended to *Descartes’ Principles of Philosophy*, and published in 1663. After defining “Being” as “whatever, when it is clearly and distinctly perceived, we find to exist necessarily, or at least to be able to exist,” he then goes on to distinguish between “chimeras,” “fictitious beings,” and “beings of reason.” A chimera cannot exist because it contains an explicit contradiction in its nature. It is, as he goes on to explain in Chapter 3, a “verbal being,” because it can only be expressed in words (and not in the intellect or the imagination); for example, the words “square circle” do not express anything that is possible or conceivable. A fictitious being may not contain a contradiction, but it also does not exist, because it is the arbitrary—that is, through the will alone—joining of two, unrelated terms, such as the traditional example of the “goat-stag” (or hircocervus). A being of reason [*ens rationis*] is “nothing but a mode of thinking, which helps us to more easily retain, explain, and imagine the things we have

understood.” (More on the epistemological functions of *entia rationis* below.) Spinoza is worried here that philosophers mistake the modes of thinking for things themselves. This leads Spinoza to assert that “being is badly divided into real being and being of reason.”

To understand this elliptical comment, we need to take a brief detour and try to see with whom Spinoza is arguing. Although Descartes’s use of this idea is significant, it is brief and does not show any deep acquaintance with the scholastic treatises in which it had been extensively discussed.<sup>10</sup> When Spinoza discusses the term in the *Metaphysical Thoughts*, appended to the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*, to which we will return below, he attempts to develop the idea in a more systematic way. In fact, it is likely that Spinoza adopted his discussion not from Descartes directly but from some of his contemporaries, the Dutch Cartesians, figures like Burgersdijk and Heereboord.<sup>11</sup> What Spinoza does, along with these other sources, is to engage more directly with the scholastic sources of Cartesian terminology. And what they had in mind was the work of the Jesuit scholastic philosopher, Francisco Suarez.

In *Metaphysical Disputation* 54, Suarez discusses *entia rationis* in detail.<sup>12</sup> A full analysis of this complicated text is beyond the scope of this chapter, but I believe that a summary of its key points is vital to understand what Spinoza is doing in the early texts and indeed throughout his work. Suarez wavered over whether to include a section on beings of reason in his work at all. The subject of a treatise on metaphysics must be real beings. But beings of reason are by definition not real beings but what he calls “shadows” of being. As Suarez writes in the prologue, “Since beings of reason are not true beings ... they are not intelligible through themselves” [57]. Suarez argues that the cause of a being of reason is the intellect alone and that beings of reason are real only to the extent that they are objects of understanding. While some of his interlocutors had on similar grounds argued that a discussion of beings of reason was useless, because they had no being in things themselves (something substantial or in substance), Suarez nonetheless claimed that “cognition and knowledge of these [beings] is necessary for human instruction” [Prologue, 57]. Indeed, they are necessary to metaphysics itself, natural philosophy, logic, and even theology.

There are several kinds of being of reason. The first is what we can call a “positive” kind, which is a relation created between two or more things, as the two examples already given show. This relationship is not based on any intrinsic qualities of the two things but rather is extrinsic, or based on the fact that the two qualities have been placed together. And although the relationship apparently refers to something real, that reference is improper (*improprius*), for



the relationship is only analogical. A further relevant distinction among these so-called positive beings of reason is that between possible and impossible entities. Possible beings are those whose existence is not necessary but also not impossible. For instance, we may think about a golden mountain, which is possible, if not real. Impossible beings of reason are those whose nature contains a contradiction. A square circle, for instance, is by its very nature impossible. The other two kinds of being of reason are negations and privations. These are purely mental entities that appear to have being but in fact do not. A privation of some quality is not itself a being of reason, but only becomes one when it becomes an entity that makes a positive claim, as if there is something that is not [III, 6]. Examples are “nothing,” “absence,” “evil,” “death,” “blindness,” and “silence.”<sup>13</sup>

The reason why they can be useful, even if they are not real, is that they are understood by comparison to true and real beings: “For what is fictitious (*fictum*) or apparent must be understood by comparison to what truly is” [Prologue, 58]. Although they exist only objectively in the intellect, beings of reason gain their value through their analogical relation to real things.

In other words, their being is understood only in relation to the being of real things. A classic example of a being of reason is a goat-stag (*hircocervus*), a chimera formed from the compound of the ideas of two real things. Likewise, the idea of a smiling meadow involves the joining of a smile with a meadow, a being that does not exist yet seems to signify something with meaning to us. Of course, neither the goat-stag nor the smiling meadow exist as real beings, but their component parts do and so the reality of the being of reason is found by analogy to what is real.<sup>14</sup>

With his brief comments in the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, Spinoza inserts himself into a complex debate, not only over “beings of reason” but over the nature of divine predication itself.<sup>15</sup> The problem in a nutshell is this: when we attribute qualities to God—God is just, merciful, etc.—do the words mean the same thing as when we use them to refer, say to a just or merciful king? In other words, are the terms univocal, pointing to God’s intrinsic qualities or essence, or merely equivocal, pointing to the purely extrinsic qualities that we observe yet may have no meaningful relation to his essence? The problem takes on a metaphysical dimension when we ask whether these qualities exist in the same way in the different instances of their use. In general terms we can ask whether the meaning of “exists” in “God exists” and “man exists” is equivocal, fundamentally different, or univocal, the same? If the relation were merely equivocal, then we could not compare our nature to God in any sense. God remains wholly unknowable.

If the relation were univocal, then the worry is that we are reducing God's nature to ours. Aquinas attempted to solve this problem by introducing (via Aristotle) a third kind of relation, which strictly speaking is neither equivocal nor univocal but analogical. That is, the terms we use to describe God are extrinsic to his nature, but yet they point to his nature in a non-arbitrary manner.<sup>16</sup> As we have just seen, Suarez follows Aquinas to some extent here, and his view on *entia rationis* echoes his view on this larger subject.<sup>17</sup> The beings of reason do not pick out the intrinsic qualities of things, yet they are not entirely superfluous either. They can surely mislead us, but they nonetheless point to something real without claiming to be real themselves.

On the one hand, Spinoza rejects anything that seems equivocal in his metaphysics. He sides with the Scotist view that being is knowable via reason and thus that our true ideas refer directly (or intrinsically) to the nature of God. There is one God whose essential nature ought to and can be defined univocally through reason. On the other hand, Spinoza still wants to make careful distinctions among equivocal terms and defend the meaningfulness and value of some of them. Hence, whereas fictions and chimeras are problematic, albeit for different reasons—the former are possible yet merely involve arbitrary connections or extrinsic relations, while the latter are simply impossible—beings of reason are different.

Instead of eliminating the analogy of being from his system, Spinoza reconceives it in terms of his metaphysical naturalism, or commitment to univocal explanation. At the level of rational explanation, there is no need for equivocal or analogical explanations. That is, from the God's eye point of view, all the finite modes of substance act and can be explained in terms of the infinite modes of God itself, which is the combination of the laws of nature as they are expressed through the total of finite modes. But from the point of view of the modes themselves, which are, by definition, only parts of the total sum of modes, all understanding will be partial, based on the comparison of one part of the system to another or to the putative whole. Just as the action of finite modes is limited by the effect of other modes on them, so too is the understanding of each mode, expressed as an idea of its own body, partial in relation to the whole. It understands itself not only as it acts in terms of its own nature but also as it is acted upon by other bodies. Some of those actions may be experienced as stimuli to action, but they are conceived always in relation to other things. Hence, given the inevitability (and ubiquity) of these partial conceptions of the world, we need to learn how to discriminate between them, prevent their misuse, and promote their limited epistemological value.

## II. The Relation of Part to Whole as a Being of Reason

The relation of beings to reason to the broader structure of *analogia entis* helps us make sense of a very difficult question in Spinoza's metaphysics, that of the relation of part to whole. It should not surprise us that Spinoza uses the idea of beings of reason in his early work to explain this problem. We find the crucial passage in the *Short Treatise*, in the second chapter of part 1, on the topic of "What God Is." Spinoza has concluded that "extension is an attribute of God," and he is aware that many think that this view is inconsistent with God's perfection. They would argue that if God is extended, then God is divisible, which undermines his uniqueness and simplicity. To which Spinoza replies: "That part and whole are not true or actual beings, but only beings of reason; consequently in Nature ... there are neither whole nor parts" [§19]. In the Second Dialogue of the *Short Treatise*, Theophilus says that "the whole is only a being of reason" [C I 78/G I 32–33].<sup>18</sup>

The very same arguments are repeated in the crucial scholium to E1p15, in which Spinoza claims that "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God." The difference is that instead of using the term "being of reason" to discuss the relation of part to whole, he says that these ideas are a product of the imagination rather than the intellect. Of course, this new terminology poses the same problem as before: if the intellect refers to what is real, God's infinite nature, then what status ontologically do the imaginative ideas of part and whole have? Do they simply refer to nothing? If so, are we better off doing away with these ideas altogether? Spinoza's admonition in the *Cogitata Metaphysica* that "Being is badly divided into real being and being of reason" should lead us to consider another way of reading this passage.

The distinctions we have examined above, between univocal, equivocal, and analogical terms, can clarify Spinoza's intent here in the *Ethics* just as they did in the earlier works. Spinoza seems committed to the idea that the modes of thinking that involve part and whole do not refer univocally to God. That is, they are not true ideas of something that really exists. If they were, then they would be ideas of independently existing finite beings, like Cartesian substances, and we have reason to believe, at this point in the argument of the *Ethics*, that this is false, that there is only one substance. In contrast, these modes of thinking are not nothing either. If the parts were nothing more than equivocal beings, then they would, properly speaking, refer to nothing and we could do away with all mention of them. The existence of parts would be an illusion. However, if the modes of thinking that refer to parts and whole are analogical in nature, then beings of reason function in a different way. They are not merely fictions,

arbitrary constructs of the will, which do not refer to anything real. The structure of analogical thinking is that these terms stand not in a direct relation to things but in an indirect relation. The imaginative ideas that finite minds have refer primarily to other finite ideas, the extrinsic relations that they have with other finite beings, which, as we shall see below, we conceive partially and inadequately. Nonetheless, those relations stand ultimately in God, and so the extrinsic relations refer indirectly to intrinsic reality of the world.

To be more specific: from the point of view of a finite being we have ideas of innumerable discrete or finite objects, which we can call X, Y, Z, etc. There are not real distinctions between these objects but modal distinctions. The collection of all these objects we call "the whole," which once named gives meaning to the notion of "part," a term that belongs to each of the objects in the "whole." These terms are neither real nor modal but distinctions of reason. Each part is analogous in that sense to the other parts, even if they are of different kinds.<sup>19</sup> The "whole" in turn, constituted from the point of view of finite modes, stands in analogous relation to God as it actually exists. From God's point of view, finite things exist not as really distinct but rather only as modes of God. From the point of view of finite modes, we say that finite things are "in" God as "parts" constitute a "whole." We can represent these relations schematically as follows:

### God is to Modes as Whole is to Parts

Infinite POV (Reason)		Finite POV (Imagination)
God		"Whole"
_____	:	_____
	:	
Modes		"Part X" + "Part Y" + "Part Z" ...etc.
<i>No Real Distinction; Only Modal Distinction</i>		<i>Distinction of Reason between Whole and Part, as well as between Parts.</i>

The relation of part to whole is not how things really are in God's nature, but an analogy made by finite things to the metaphysically real nature of God.<sup>20</sup>

When Spinoza rejects the standard dichotomy between real being and being of reason, he is not rejecting the value of a being of reason. Instead, he is pointing

out a possible misuse of the distinction, one that leads to positing something that is not real as real. But with that caveat in mind, we can still use the beings of reason in certain ways. That is what we shall turn to next.

### III. Beings of Reason and Knowing Things by Analogy

Spinoza now tries to explain how precisely Beings of Reason can help know the world, although in this apparently mundane account we find a rejection of one of the most basic principles of Suarez's Aristotelianism. We find this account in CM I, ch. i and also in the TIE and letters from this period. Their first function is to *retain* ideas. This requires an act of memory by which we retain some particular idea by linking it to something similar or putting it under a single name.<sup>21</sup> Philosophers have frequently availed themselves of this function of a being of reason through the construction of classes of objects through ideas like species, genus, etc.<sup>22</sup> What Suarez would have taken as true ideas about real things in the world Spinoza reduces to a mnemonic device. Their second function is to *explain* things through serving as a mode of comparison. The examples Spinoza offers are time, number, and measure. The same topic is also discussed in the well-known "Letter 12 on the Infinite."<sup>23</sup> As he writes there, "From the fact that when we conceive Quantity abstracted from Substance and separate Duration from the way it flows from eternal things, we can determine them as we please, there arise Time and Measure—Time to determine Duration and Measure to determine Quantity in such a way that, so far as possible, we imagine them easily" [C I 203]. The third function is to *imagine* non-entities positively as beings, especially in the case of imagining negations of things as having real being, like darkness, blindness. Like the prior mode, this one functions in much the same way as Suarez outlined.

Spinoza also adopts Suarez's view that there is an analogical basis in the deployment of beings of reason. He expresses this in terms of the mental activity of *feigning* an explanation. In the TIE Spinoza discusses when we *feign* ideas, which is nothing other than attributing existence to that which has no existence [§52]. Spinoza describes the activity of feigning in just the same way as he describes the different sorts of *entia rationis*. We can feign the existence of an impossible thing, like a square circle, or we can feign the existence of a possible thing. It is worthwhile to note that when Spinoza speaks of feigning in the TIE he offers us not objects but narratives: "E.g., I feign that Peter, whom I know, is going home, that he is coming to visit me, and the like. Here I ask, what does such an idea concern? I see that it concerns only possible, and not necessary

or impossible things" [§52]. We can expand the domain of beings of reason to include fables and other narratives, such as in Descartes's *Le Monde*, which of course is explicitly framed in this manner, or Biblical narratives that play such an important role in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and the development of Spinoza's political thought.<sup>24</sup> A story is not just a simple analogy but a compound of analogies whose own structure, its plot or moral, we might also describe as a being of reason.

The apparent power of feigning is undermined by its inherent tendency to mislead:

The less men know Nature, the more easily they can feign many things, such as, that trees speak, that men are changed in a moment into stones and into springs, that nothing becomes something, that even Gods are changed into beasts and into men, and infinitely many other things of that kind. [TIE §58]

It would be best if we did not have to feign at all. God, who, if he exists, must be omniscient, "can feign nothing at all" [§54]. Spinoza thinks that it is possible to acquire true ideas and to deduce other true ones methodically from those with which we began. In this way we would replace possible truths (and the doubt that accompanies them) with necessary ones.<sup>25</sup> Despite the ways in which a Being of Reason can help us in our practical concerns, Spinoza reminds us that they are limited and potentially a cause of error. We ought to recognize Spinoza's attempt to trim Suarez's beard with Occam's razor! He cautions the reader not to confuse beings of reason with real beings, and notes that beings of reason do not tell us what is true and false but only what is good or bad for us. Spinoza ridicules both Platonic and Aristotelian notions of form [CM I, ch. i] and he does not have much use for their taxonomies of matter either in terms of genus and species. This is also true in the case of universals. In several places, Spinoza attacks what many philosophers took to be a central idea.<sup>26</sup>

As we saw above in the case of metaphysics, Spinoza preserves the various functions of beings of reason in his later works and also generalizes them, incorporating them into a larger theory of the imagination. Spinoza defines the imagination as the idea of the affections of other bodies on one's own. They are "partial" because they express only one point of view of the complex set of events that constitute the world. They are "confused" because the individual finite subject does not easily distinguish the cause of the action from the effect. They are "inadequate" because they lack the systematic and law-like nature of "adequate" or rational ideas.

Although each inadequate idea or “image” is discrete, they are invariably linked together in chains and combinations of various sorts. In his categorization of the kinds of knowledge, Spinoza actually distinguishes between two kinds of the imagination, what he calls “singular things” and “signs.”

From what has been said above, it is clear that we perceive many things and form universal notions:

I. 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 (see E2p29c); for that reason I have been accustomed to call such perceptions knowledge from random experience;

II. from signs, e.g., from the fact that, having heard or read certain words, we recollect things, and form certain ideas of them, which are like them, and through which we imagine the things (E2p18s). These two ways of regarding things I shall henceforth call knowledge of the first kind, opinion or imagination. [E2p40s2]

There is of course a basic kind of similarity that is built into the very structure of the representation of bodies in ideas. But what is more important for our purposes is the way in which these simple forms of representation become conjoined together into more complex forms of associations. Spinoza recognizes that implicit in the signs we use—the words that stand for the images—is some principle of “likeness” that links together disparate images into signs that stand for something. How are these inadequate ideas grouped together?

We can use the scholastic theory of analogy to account for the various ways in which images (or inadequate ideas) can be associated with one another. If the association is purely random, or equivocal, then the signs are really no different from individual ideas. We will be able to learn nothing at all about the world. If they are associated via an act of will based on some artifice, that is some rule that links two ideas together without any reference to an internal principle, then we have something like a poetic metaphor, an artifice that follows some principle that we have constructed. What we will learn, if we examine these signs, is nothing more than the artifice itself that constructed the connection in the first place. If the association is based on some principle that seems to be internal to the things, then the sign will claim something more. It will claim to know the essence of things.

But this is where, Spinoza thinks, we have to be exceedingly careful. For only reason, not the imagination, can rightly claim to know the internal properties of finite modes. This is the peculiar danger of philosophy. It uses the principle of likeness, itself based on ideas of extrinsic rather than intrinsic qualities of things,

to claim knowledge of the essences of things. This is where Spinoza criticizes the “universals” that have been constructed by other philosophers:

These notions they call *Universal*, like Man, Horse, Dog, and the like, have arisen from similar causes, namely, because so many images (e.g., of men) are formed at one time in the human body that they surpass the power of imagining.  
[E2p40s2]

In other words, what seems like reason is really the imagination in action—Analogy instead of deduction. We have mistaken equivocal terms for univocal ones. Philosophy, the quest for certain knowledge, is undermined. An explanation using these equivocal terms will not lead to agreement but foster disagreement and discord, because each person understands the meaning of the explanations using these terms in different ways. If the idea of man, for instance, is formed on the basis of a principle of analogy, using either a partial set of ideas as its basis, or a single idea derived from experience that serves as the *primum analogatum* and helps us pick out others as lesser examples of the model, then we mistake the partial and particular for the truly universal. Writ large, these are, in effect, the very same reasons why we should reject analogical explanation when it comes to knowledge of God or substance. What is actually particular is being substituted for what is supposed to be universal.

There is a further, related complication. We started with the assumption that there are images of discrete objects. But since there are no metaphysically simple parts in Spinoza's system—that is, really distinct objects—then how do we form ideas of them?<sup>27</sup> There is, of course, a metaphysically adequate idea of them: they are modes of substance. But from the point of view of finite beings, we more often than not have inadequate or confused ideas of these modes. How are these inadequate or imaginative ideas of discrete objects constituted? First, we must rely on the all-important distinction of reason between “part” and “whole,” a distinction which functions on two levels. It makes the distinction between God conceived as the “whole” and God conceived as “parts of the whole.” Then, within this totality of infinite parts in the whole there are relative parts and wholes, which are purely relational. In other words, if the human body is conceived as the “whole” then all that constitutes it are its “parts.” Of course, the whole human body is, conceived in a different relational scale, just a part, say within a society, which in turn is a part within nature.<sup>28</sup> But how do these relative notions of part and whole become fixed as discrete objects within an ever-changing field of motion and rest? There is an adequate idea of the finite mode in Spinoza's system, which commentators have attempted to explicate in a variety of ways.<sup>29</sup>



And, of course, that idea expresses the true nature of the object. But the question that faces us is how the imagination conceives of something (inadequately) as a discrete object, an idea that will only bear an analogous relation to the true object. Here the two-step process of the imagination sketched in E2p40s2 becomes important. There are perhaps infinitely many discrete and inadequate ideas produced by the imagination. They are as various as the relations a finite mode can have with others, which is infinite. But we don't experience the world simply as a shifting field of infinitely many unique objects. Because we pick out similarities between the objects of the imagination we are almost always engaged in the process of grouping them in stable kinds, which we designate through names and signs. There is an unending interplay between the unique object and its kinds. Because both are inadequately conceived (albeit in different ways) the experience of either imaginative singularity or imaginative kinds (like universals) is always unsatisfactory. We need to make sense of shifting particulars and so we name them via some focal point of similarity in an analogous relation. Yet these kinds are inevitably unsatisfactory because they never account for infinite relational complexity of experience.

Does this mean that we need to reject the imagination as a path to knowledge? Of course, if we were God, then we could rely on reason alone. However, as finite beings, we cannot act solely according to the God's eye perspective and inevitably are in the world of the imagination and passions. We have seen how, if we explain the mechanisms of the imagination in terms of the doctrine of analogy, we can make sense of typical philosophical errors, such as the substitution of our particular experience for the universal. We can also use it more positively to explain the utility of the imagination.

If we inscribe the equivocal world of images within the univocal world of universal law, then we can use analogical explanation as a bridge from the imagination to reason. Let's take a look at the famous example of the proportional that Spinoza uses to illustrate the kinds of knowledge:

I shall explain all these with one example. Suppose there are three numbers, and the problem is to find a fourth which is to the third as the second is to the first. Merchants do not hesitate to multiply the second by the third, and divide the product by the first, because they have not yet forgotten what they heard from their teacher without any demonstration, or because they have often found this in the simplest numbers, or from the force of the Demonstration of P7 in Bk. VII of Euclid, viz. from the common property of proportionals. But in the simplest numbers none of this is necessary. Given the numbers 1, 2, and 3, no one fails to see that the fourth proportional number is and we see this much more clearly

because we infer the fourth number from the ratio which, in one glance, we see the first number to have the second. [E2p40s2]

The merchant has at hand a procedure that links the numbers in a relation determined not by demonstration (as the rational person would have) but by likeness to a rule that he learned by imitation. It turns out that there is a rational truth to the matter, one known by the competent mathematician, but the merchant approximates it through a procedure that has been honed, not by ratiocination but by experience and the use of analogy to organize that experience. The fact that the merchant uses the imagination—and more particularly an analogy—does not mean that the solution is wrong. It is neither chimerical nor fictional. The solution to the problem is not, strictly speaking, true, because it was not arrived at through reason. But it is an approximation of the truth, based on analogical principles. The extent of approximation can be measured independently by reason. But it can also be determined indirectly, through experience. Deleuze notes that, in the case of reason, “the application of common notions implies, in general, a strange harmony between reason and the imagination, between the laws of reason and those of the imagination.”<sup>30</sup> The same “strange harmony” also applies in reverse, albeit less predictably.<sup>31</sup> The imagination can arrive at something approximating the truth through analogy. The pragmatic value of analogical reason bears directly on the use of beings of reason in Spinoza’s ethical theory.

#### IV. Beings of Reason and Doing the Right Thing by Analogy

In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza writes that he “resolved at least to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself, and which alone would affect the mind, all other being rejected—whether there was something which, once found and acquired, would continuously give me the greatest joy, to eternity” [§1]. Spinoza rejects sensual pleasure, wealth, and honor, and says that, like a man suffering illness, in the “greatest danger,” he must seek a remedy for his situation [§7]. The highest good is “the knowledge of the union that the mind has with the whole of nature” [§13]. But because our natures are weak, subject to error and the lures of the passions, it is not easy to arrive at this good directly. Hence Spinoza outlines a means to that end, which he calls the “true good”: man conceives a human nature much stronger and more enduring than his own and “seeks means that

will lead him to such a perfection" [§13]. However, just before he proposes the means to his remedy, he adds an important qualification:

To understand this [the true good and the highest good] properly, it must be noted that good and bad are said of things only in a certain respect, so that one and the same thing can be called both good and bad according to different respects. The same applies to perfect and imperfect, especially after we have recognized that everything that happens according to the eternal order, and according to certain laws of nature. [TIE, §12]

There does not appear to be anything that is intrinsically good; rather, what is good and what is perfect (as well as their opposites) involve a contingent relation to a subject, who makes a judgment about that relation.

In KV, I, ch. x, Spinoza provides a somewhat more detailed account of the status of "good" and "evil" in terms of scholastic vocabulary.

- [1] Some things are in our intellect and not in Nature; so these are only our own work, and they help us to understand things distinctly. Among these we include all relations, which have reference to different things. These we call *beings of reason*.
- [2] So the question now is whether good and evil should be regarded as *beings of reason* or as *real beings*. But since good and evil are nothing but relations, they must, beyond any doubt, be regarded as *beings of reason*. For one never says that something is good except in respect to something else that is not so good, or not so useful to us as something else. So, one says that a man is bad only in respect to one who is better, or that an apple is bad only in respect to another that is good, or better. None of this could possibly be said if there were not something better, or good, in respect to which [the bad] is so called.
- [3] Therefore, if one says that something is good, that is nothing but saying that it agrees well with the universal Idea which we have of such things. But as we have already said, things must agree with their particular Ideas, whose being must be a perfect essence, and not with universal ones, because then they would not exist.
- [4] As for confirming what we have just said, the thing is clear to us, but to conclude what we have said we shall add the following proofs.

All things which exist in Nature are either things or actions. [KV, I, ch. x/C I 92/G I 49]

Hence the terms "good/evil" and "perfect/imperfect" do not refer to anything that is real in the world, an entity, but rather refers to a relation that is constructed by our intellect.

We find almost the exact same structure in the Preface to *Ethics* Part 4, albeit with a slightly different order of presentation. First, he notes that “perfection and imperfection ... are only modes of thinking, that is, notions that we are accustomed to feign because we compare individuals of the same species or genus to one another” [G II 207]. He then goes on to say that “as far as good and evil are concerned, they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, or notions we form because we compare things to one another.” Nonetheless, despite these conceptual limitations, “still we must retain these words” because we want to form a model of human nature that helps us become more perfect, and “good” is what “certainly is a means” to come closer to that model and “evil” as that which does not [G II 208].

Thus, we find many of the same features of the early works in the *Ethics*. The model of human nature has several epistemic functions that were associated with the *entia rationis*. It is based on the collection and retention of many images of human beings, which it blends together into an “ideal” for the sake of comparing subsequent instances. It uses a normative notion of perfection to perform that task, a notion that is really nothing better than a feigned ideal. Once the ideal model has been formed it serves as the focal point for others who are categorized in this class, that is, similar enough to the model that they are classified as members of this kind. This, as we have noted earlier, is an instance of the most prominent kind of analogy, the so-called analogy of attribution.

The model of human nature also shares the same basic metaphysical structure that we have investigated above. It does not refer to a real entity—even if it sometimes appears to those who use it that it does in the form of a universal. It is not an entity with a single meaning. But neither does it refer to nothing, that is, to the endless play of equivocation of pure fiction. The structure of the model gives sense to the multiple meanings that it evokes, depending on the particular set of experiences of its users, through the very idea of a primary analogue, to which the others are subordinate. It becomes the basis of a “family resemblance” that once constructed organizes subsequent experience in light of its focal point. The model is real as a mode of thought that bears an analogous relation to what is really real and known by reason.

Finally, the model of human nature bears a pragmatic relation to truth and can be either bolstered or undermined via experience. This is a crucial point and requires underlining. Although we can talk about the metaphysical and epistemological structure of beings of reason, their justification is found in

practice rather than theoretical knowledge, for which they are not suited. The criterion of success of the model is not how much better we know the world, but how much better we manage to succeed in our striving. Spinoza makes this clear in relation to the moral “beings of reason.” He defines “good” at the beginning of *Ethics* Part 4 as “what we certainly know to be useful to us” [E4d1]. We can see how the value of a model of human nature can be determined not by its theoretical truth (although that might affect its “certainty” and ultimate value, as Spinoza thinks that true knowledge is most useful), but by its utility. Indeed, even if we are not certain about the truth of a model it can nonetheless help organize our fragmented experience into a more coherent whole that can improve our power of striving. The adequacy of the model will be judged primarily in these terms. Moreover, this pragmatic notion of value also obtains for the other non-moral beings of reason, such as measures of time, classification of kinds, and rules of thumb, like informal methods of solving mathematical problems.

## Notes

- 1 Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza 1: Dieu* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1968), 415.
- 2 TIE, §51, footnote about the “fictitious idea.”
- 3 KV, I, ch. x [C I 92–93/G I 49].
- 4 CM I, ch. i [C I 299ff/G I 233].
- 5 Filippo Mignini has recently surveyed the notion of fiction in Spinoza’s work, focusing on the precedents of Descartes and Bacon. See Filippo Mignini, “Fictio/Verzierung (e) in Spinoza’s Early Writings,” in *The Young Spinoza: A Metaphysician in the Making*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). Scholars—including Jacob Freudenthal, Wim Klever, and more recently Robert Schnepf—have also analyzed these terms and sketched the relation of Spinoza to some of the late scholastic sources on this topic. See: Jacob Freudenthal, “Spinoza und die Scholastik,” in *Philosophische Aufsätze: E. Zeller gewidmet* (Leipzig: Fues’s Verlag, 1887); Wim Klever, “Remarques sur le *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (Experientia vaga, paradoxa, ideae fictae),” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 71, no. 1 (1987): 101–113; Robert Schnepf, “Von Der Naturalisierung Der Ontologie Zur Naturalisierung Der Ethik: Spinoza’s Metaethik Im Context Spätscholastischer *Enthia-Moralia*-Theorien,” *Studia Spinozana* 16 (2008): 105–128.
- 6 See CM I, ch. i [C I 301/G I 235].
- 7 Karolina Hübner, “Spinoza on Essences, Universals, and Beings of Reason,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 96, no. 2 (2015): 58–88.

- 8 Tad Schmaltz, "The Disappearance of Analogy in Descartes, Spinoza, and Régis," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30, no. 1 (2000): 85, 113. Henri Krop also suggests that Spinoza has returned in a sense to the doctrine of the analogy of being, but he does not specify in what way. See Henri Krop, "Ens," in *The Continuum Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Wiep van Bunge et al. (London: Bloomsbury, 2011).
- 9 Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1990), 46–49. In Deleuze, *Spinoza: philosophie pratique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1981), 87–88, his discussion of "analogie" in the article on "éminence" is instructive. He notes the important role of analogy in the early works, but his claim is that the idea of common notions in the *Ethics* replaces it.
- 10 See, however, Jean-Luc Marion, *La théologie blanche de Descartes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981).
- 11 I owe this point to Roger Ariew. See Roger Ariew, *Descartes and the First Cartesians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), and Ariew, "Descartes and Leibniz as Readers of Suarez: Theory of Distinctions and the Principle of Individuation," in *The Philosophy of Francisco Suarez*, ed. Benjamin Hill and Henrik Lagerlund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 12 Francisco Suarez, *On Beings of Reason (De Entibus Rationis): Metaphysical Disputation 54*, trans. John P. Doyle (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1995).
- 13 See Doyle, 31. Privation is the lack of something in a subject, which it would naturally have, while negation is the absolute lack of something (32).
- 14 Thus, as John P. Doyle points out in his introduction to the 54th *Disputatio*, this analogical relationship can also be expressed as a *metaphor* (23). The meadow is not really smiling but the semi-circle of blooming flowers makes it seem as if it were. Because the entities have this analogical relation to real being, they can guide us (or perhaps more often than not, misguide us), albeit indirectly, in the world. For further discussion see David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1986).
- 15 Wolfson claims a Hebrew source for these distinctions and disagrees with Freudenthal, who says that there are no sources for these distinctions (between *ens fictum*, *ens chimera*, *ens rationis*, and *ens realis*) in Jewish philosophy. See Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Process of His Reasoning*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), vol. 1, 161–162, esp. footnote 3. And Freudenthal, "Spinoza und die Scholastik."
- 16 They are similar without being identical. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defined "analogy" as the relation of proportion of comparison to two relations (i.e., four terms) [1131a31–32]. Among others, Paul Ricœur sees the tradition of *analogia entis* as going back to Aristotle. However, some scholars have argued that Aristotle himself did not see any connection between the discussion of homonymy and analogy. Hence, the tradition's reliance on this proof text apparently would

- be mistaken. See Paul Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975), 344–356. See also Christopher Shields, *Order in Multiplicity: Homonymy in the Philosophy of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 10, note 3.
- 17 See Disputation 28 in Francisco Suarez, *The Metaphysical Demonstration of the Existence of God: Metaphysical Disputations 28–29*, trans. John P. Doyle (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2004). See also E. J. Ashworth, "Suarez on the Analogy of Being: Some Historical Background," *Vivarium* 33, no. 1 (1995): 50–75.
  - 18 The context here is more complicated and illustrates the ways in which Spinoza wants to appropriate scholastic discourse for his own purposes. In the First Dialogue, the character Lust claims that Reason's view is that God is the whole outside of its parts, which leads to a kind of *reductio*, in which Lust, citing a scholastic distinction, says that "the whole is a second notion, which is no thing in Nature, outside of human thought" [KV, I, 1st dialogue, §10/C I 75/G I 30, l. 5]. Reason replies that Lust is only using "ambiguous words—the usual practice of those who oppose the truth." But Spinoza does not want to give up on the utility of the idea of a "being of reason." In the Second Dialogue, Theophilus comes back to the part-whole relation and distinguishes the use of one being of reason, the "whole" from another, the "universal": "To this we may add that the whole is only a being of reason and differs from the universal in these respects" [C I 78/G I 33]. For some comments on this, see Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza*, vol. 1, 326–327.
  - 19 As Spinoza notes in KV, I, 2nd dialogue, "The universal includes only parts of the same kind, whereas the whole includes parts of the same kind and of another kind" [C I 78/G I 33].
  - 20 Melamed points out that it was common in the seventeenth century to argue that modes are not parts of substance, "to make it clear that the entity at stake cannot exist independently of its subject." If we interpret the part-whole relation as an analogy, then we can preserve the metaphysically true idea that modes are not really parts, while allowing for the imaginative experience in which parts appear to be relatively independent of the whole that they constitute.
  - 21 Spinoza gives an account of memory in E2p17c and a physiological account of it in the demonstration to this corollary.
  - 22 "Still, these modes of thinking cannot be called ideas, nor can they be said to be true or false, just as love cannot be called true or false, but [only] good or bad. So when Plato said that man is a featherless biped, he erred no more than those who said that man is a rational animal. For Plato was no less aware than anyone else that man is a rational animal. But he referred man to a certain class so that, when he wished to think about man, he would immediately fall into the thought of man by recalling that class, which he could easily remember. Indeed Aristotle erred very seriously if he thought that he had adequately explained the human essence by that

definition of his. Whether, indeed, Plato did well, one can only ask. But this is not the place for these matters" [CM I, ch. i/C I 301].

- 23 See Yitzhak Y. Melamed, "On the Exact Science of Nonbeings: Spinoza's View of Mathematics," *Iyyun, The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 49 (2000): 3–22.
- 24 Spinoza's view of literature here, echoed by his discussion of *Orlando Furioso* in the TTP, ch. viii, §61 [G III 110], which he describes as a mere trifle, seems unduly pessimistic. But it is counterbalanced somewhat by his view of historical narratives (or chronicles), including those of the Bible, which he thinks can point analogically to some moral truths, i.e., a better way of life.
- 25 See also E1p15s for frequent uses of "feigning."
- 26 See E2p48s, for instance.
- 27 In a note, Deleuze criticizes the view of Rivaud (in Albert Rivaud, "La Physique de Spinoza," *Chronicon Spinozanum* 4 (1924–1926): 24–57), who argues that the notion of "completely simple bodies" does not make sense in an infinitely divisible space. Deleuze claims that "the reality of simple bodies lies beyond any possible perception." In other words, simple bodies (or modes) are grasped through the intellect but not the imagination. See Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 381, note 11. Deleuze writes: "Modes ... are something more than phantoms of the imagination, something more than things of reason." Still, the problem remains how the imagination conceives of discrete bodies.
- 28 Spinoza makes this point in the important scholium to E2le7.
- 29 For Deleuze, a mode's essence is an "a determinate degree of intensity, an irreducible degree of power" (*Expressionism*, 202). For Curley, it is a finite effect. For Melamed, it is property of substance. I don't think that the truth of one account or another of Spinoza's metaphysics of mode directly affects my account of the imaginative view, as long as one can make an analogy between the inadequate (or imaginative idea) and the adequate idea. As we shall see below, the possibility that this inadequate idea can lead us indirectly to the adequate idea will depend on the truth of the rational account of Spinoza's metaphysics.
- 30 Deleuze, *Expressionism*, 294.
- 31 It can also serve as a bridge not only through its results but via the joyous emotions that it produces when experience confirms the analogical rule. As I have argued elsewhere, Spinoza does not think that wonder—the affect produced by a singular unexplained event—is the mechanism that spurs scientific inquiry. See Michael A. Rosenthal, "Miracles, Wonder, and the State in Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*," in *Spinoza's Theological Political Treatise: A Critical Guide*, ed. Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Michael A. Rosenthal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Instead, as Deleuze emphasizes, it is joy that stimulates further inquiry. Now in the case of reason there is a clear internal ladder or spiral linking knowledge to joy, as each success builds to another in the chain



of deduction. This has led some commentators, such as Matheron, to argue that there is a kind of automatic process at the heart of Spinoza's system that once begun has a necessary internal dynamic. However, in the case of analogical reasoning, with its inherent pitfalls, there is no such process. Because the relation to the truth is indirect, based on extrinsic relations, there is nothing necessary about its progress. Still, once some success is found, the joy it produces can lead some at least to consider what caused the success, and this might lead the merchant to become a mathematician.

# A Response: *Analogia* and *Ens Rationis*

Jacqueline Lagrée

## Introduction

In metaphysics, the status of analogy's meaning and use is related to the question of the equivocity of being by virtue of the fact that the former raises the question of homonymy's meaning and status. Homonymy can be held to signify either by means of a common term [*pros hén*: for example, the healthy for health] or by means of analogy by signifying an equality of relations [*isotès logon*].<sup>1</sup> In the history of metaphysics, the example of the division of the line in Plato's *Republic* comes to mind. Socrates maintains that sight is to the body as the intellect is to the soul, and the analogy allows him to maintain the unity of substances in their generic kinship, while also maintaining their specific difference.

For his part, Spinoza makes little use of the term *analogia*. When Spinoza does employ the term *analogia* in the *Political Treaties* in chapter 8, §26 [TP, ch. viii, §26] [*coherentiam sive imperii analogiam observare*], he does this in order to signify an exact relation. This is why Charles Ramond translates the passage (correctly) as: "To observe its coherence, that is to say, the State's right proportions" [*observer leur cohérence, c'est à dire les justes proportions de cet État*].<sup>2</sup> Likewise, in *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* at DPP1p6s, Spinoza denies the possibility of any analogy or congruence between the impossible and the possible, or nothingness and some thing, since "[we] can compare things with one another and know the relation between them only if [we] have a clear and distinct concept of each of them."<sup>3</sup>

Because Spinoza maintains the univocity of being, the traditional meaning of analogy in scholastic metaphysics is not pertinent for understanding his

philosophy. The better precedent would be found in Stoicism, with the process of formation of common notions, particularly the notion of the good. According to Cicero and Seneca, two authors Spinoza knows, the idea of the good is formed by *collatio rationis* ("rational comparison"), a Latin translation of *analogia*.<sup>4</sup> For the Stoics, the notion of the good is neither innate nor empirical; rather, it is formed by the mind's activity on things given by experience. The *collatio rationis* can function by augmentation (the Cyclops), by diminution (the Pygmy), or by the identity of relations, which is properly speaking an analogy, and it is in this way that all people form the idea of the good. Just as honey is not the sweetest element but the sweet or the soft *par excellence*, that thing in relation to which all sweet things are determined, similarly the absolute good, which has nothing better than it, is that in relation to which all other goods can be held to be relatively good. This is especially true in virtue of the fact that although one cannot make bad use of the good, other goods (wealth, health, pleasure, honor) are susceptible to both good and bad use.<sup>5</sup>

If we now return to Spinoza, we see that, for him, the good is not a real being, but rather a being of reason.<sup>6</sup> Good and bad are relative terms,<sup>7</sup> but the good is neither nothing nor is it a fictive being; rather, it is formed by the association of ideas and in relation to our desire and our utility: "By good here I understand every kind of Joy, and whatever leads to it, and especially what satisfies any kind of longing, whatever that may be."<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, for Spinoza, as for the Stoics, there is a Sovereign Good: the knowledge and love of God.<sup>9</sup> If, properly speaking, Spinoza does not give a definition of the good this is because the term is not univocal, but rather relative to some desire or expectation, and because Spinoza refuses the traditional scholastic definitions of the term.

Therefore, for Spinoza, analogy does not have a technical meaning (like in metaphysics, *analogia entis*), but it only means a correct proportion, an equality of relations. Aside from the rule of the three, which is a perfectly validated arithmetic analogy, and which serves as a model to illustrate the three types of knowledge, Spinoza notes that the use of analogy is often less than rigorous, grounded as it is in the work of the imagination. When these beings of reason are taken to be real beings, theoretical monsters are born.

I will proceed to examine how this analogical imagination functions within two apparently very distinct domains, namely, mythology and metaphysics. Allow me already to offer some examples of what sorts of things these are: will, nothingness, the One, the good, and desire are *entia rationis metaphysica*; Pegasus, Adam, and the Devil are *entia ficta*; and Socrates or the wise man's freedom are *entia realia*.

To understand the nature of beings of reason and their theoretical status, it is necessary to ask how they are formed, to wit, if they are produced by the understanding alone, or if the imagination plays a role in their production. We must be careful not to mistake an *ens rationis* (a provisory tool of thought, inexistent outside the mind) for an *ens fictum*. An *ens fictum* results from the arbitrary conjunction of two terms; such a thing can, therefore, be true by accident. A being of reason, on the other hand, is only a pedagogical device, so it cannot be true or false, although it can be good or bad, that is say, efficacious or inefficacious. Whether we are speaking of an *ens rationis* or an *ens fictum*, we are making use of the first kind of knowledge.

I will now proceed to analyze three aspects of Spinoza's theory of analogy, namely the nature of fictive beings and of beings of reason, their respective modes of production, and their respective effects. Again, for the purposes of this analysis, it is important not to confuse a distinction of reason, which may have a pedagogical use (e.g., between an individual and their conatus, or between a body and its movement), with a being of reason, something that we must not endow with a usurped ontological consistency (e.g., the will).

An *ens rationis* "is nothing but a mode of thinking, which helps us to more easily retain, explain, and imagine the things we have understood."<sup>10</sup> Memory and the imagination, for example, function by resemblance and analogy. The same is true of the understanding when it makes use of comparisons and calls on a being of reason (such as number, time, and measurement) in order to explain things or distinguish among them. For the imagination, Spinoza gives examples cast in the language of privation (e.g., blindness, extremity, shadows). Moreover, in order to consider *Natura naturata* as a single being, we must consider as analogous the unity of all existing things and the unity of God's idea or decree that conserves this being. "*Si ad analogiam totius naturae attendimus, ipsam ut unum ens considerare possumus et per consequens una tantum erit Dei idea sive decretum de natura naturata.*"<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the use of analogy is, for Spinoza, nothing but a *way of considering things*, and a means by which things are envisioned *by us*, such that they become representable for the imagination and understood more easily. However, analogy is not a rational or divine way of thinking. God does not have ideas of *entia ficta vel rationis*: God does not comprehend beings of reason as such, although he does comprehend these as features of the human mind, inasmuch as he conserves it.<sup>12</sup> The same can be said of his knowledge of general things, evils, and sins, which God only comprehends inasmuch as these are modes of thought of the human mind. In short, God comprehends singular and positive things, real beings.

A being of reason does not exist in nature, no more than parts and wholes do.<sup>13</sup> “Some things are in our intellect and not in Nature; so these are only our own work, and they help us to *understand things distinctly*. Among these we include all relations, which have reference to different things. These we call beings of reason [*entia rationis*].”<sup>14</sup> For example, a good clock, for us, is one that gives us the right time of day. For a Surrealist, like Dali, a good clock might be a clock that always would give the wrong time.

Insofar as they are formed by transposal and comparison, beings of reason and fictive beings are produced in a relatively straightforward way. It matters less the specific way that they are produced by the mind than that which they are (or rather, are not) and what enters into play during their production. A fictive being (or any fiction) is formed “when a man, from his sheer freedom alone, knowingly and intentionally ... connects what he wishes to connect and disjoins what he wishes to disjoin.”<sup>15</sup> Even if it is a rational procedure and implies equality, the use of analogy is a fictional mode of thought, inasmuch as analogies compare incomparable things according to inexact relations. This is especially salient in the case of miracles: the act of comparing, and treating as similar, becomes a general functional substitute for a system of explaining natural causes.<sup>16</sup> We can see this more clearly if we examine mythological and metaphysical inventions.

The power of some fiction is inversely proportional to true knowledge.<sup>17</sup> It is therefore impossible to forge the fiction of an inexistent God; reciprocally, it is easy to forge a representation of chimeras.<sup>18</sup> We do this by combining features belonging to different animal species. Yet, as with the unicorn, the chimera is a fiction whose existence Nature precludes. The case of Adam is a bit more complex. Adam is a fiction because he is defined in a general manner as being without historical or geographical determination. At E4p68s, Adam symbolizes the birth of man, when his body and inadequate ideas dominate him. He recognizes his likeness in Eve; that is to say, Adam recognizes in Eve that which is most useful to him.<sup>19</sup> If Adam were to remain like this, Adam would be a free man. But Adam does not know how to distinguish between man and animal and he imitates the snake.<sup>20</sup> At his birth, Adam was unaware of good and evil. He ceased being free when he ceased obeying the laws of his own nature and when he mistook the snake’s nature for his own nature.

The aptitude to forge fictions and believe in their truthfulness is inversely proportional to true knowledge: “But as we have said, the less men know Nature, the more easily they can feign many things, such as, that trees speak, that men are changed in a moment into stones and into springs, that nothing becomes something, that even Gods are changed into beasts and into men, and infinitely

many other things of that kind.”<sup>21</sup> Although a fiction is necessarily confused, a fiction is capable of maintaining itself indefinitely, up until it is chased away by a clear idea. Furthermore, habits of the imagination differ from individual to individual: the traces of a horse in the sand will not evoke the same thing to a farmer as to a soldier,<sup>22</sup> yet neither will see anything more than the traces of the horse in the sand. The same is true of the aptitude to arbitrarily link ideas together in metaphysics.

Metaphysical inventions are prolific. Spinoza hardly pays much attention to these as he considers them as little less than uninteresting mistakes. But we could show, for example, how the philosophical claim that man possesses multiple souls is a groundless attempt at accounting for the different functions of the mode of thought. Likewise, universal ideas are but beings of reason, not real beings.<sup>23</sup> For example, the will is not the cause of individual volitions; humanity is not the cause of Peter or Paul; desire is only an abstraction of *conatus*.

The effects of fictive beings and of beings of reason are often negative, although at times their use can be beneficial. Consequently, they can be corrected and oriented as a means of leading us to a happy and free life. Among the negative effects, we can place false beliefs, superstitions, and false explanations, all of which hinder the progress of science. Among the positive effects, we can place the capacity for memorization, with its pedagogical virtues. Is there a way of removing the negative effects?

Take the example of love. Love always begins as a fiction, although it can be elevated and become the *amor intellectualis Dei*. We might even be able to order the different forms of love according to their correspondence to the different kinds of knowledge:

- (1) Love by hearsay: for example, the love of a father for his son, or of a soldier for their country; the same goes with respect to hatred by hearsay.<sup>24</sup>
- (2) Love that comes from a true belief: for example, the desire to become the model of a free man leads us to true knowledge and the highest love, the love of humankind. Love aiming to achieve some union with a perishable thing invariably disappoints.
- (3) Love that comes from a true concept: for example, the love of God, which is the same thing as the truth. No more hatred is possible at this level.<sup>25</sup>

If Spinoza claims that the *entia rationis*, responsible for misleading so many metaphysicians, are inconsistent, and if, likewise, he carefully avoids making use of these, situating his discourse at the level of the second or third kind of knowledge, he does not however entirely deny to beings of reason or fictive

beings a certain pedagogical virtue. Nevertheless, such instruments would only be without risk in the hands of someone who, precisely, would not need them. To refuse to use such instruments is not to lose anything at all, but consists in making a step on the path that leads to liberty and true knowledge.

## Notes

- 1 Cf. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1131a31.
- 2 Translator's note: Curley's translation of the relevant passage reads as follows: "Anyone willing to carefully consider how these foundations fit together will easily see their coherence or the proportion of the rule" [G III 319].
- 3 DPP1p6s [G I 162].
- 4 Cf. Cicero, *De finibus* III, §10.
- 5 Cf. Seneca, Ep. 120, §3.
- 6 KV, I, ch. x, §2 [G I 49].
- 7 TIE §10 [G II 8].
- 8 E2p39s.
- 9 Cf. E4p28.
- 10 CM I, ch. i, §3 [G I 233].
- 11 CM II, ch. vii, §8 [G I 264]. Translator's note: Curley's translation of the relevant passage reads as follows: "Finally, if we attend to the proportion of the whole of nature, we can consider it as one being, and consequently there will only be one idea of God, or decree concerning natura naturata."
- 12 CM II, ch. vii, §8 [G I 263].
- 13 Cf. KV, I, ch. ii, §19 [G I 24].
- 14 KV, I, ch. x, §1 [G I 49].
- 15 CM I, ch. i, §3 [G I 233].
- 16 Cf. Henri Laux, *Imagination et religion chez Spinoza* (Paris: Vrin, 1993), 70.
- 17 TIE §58 [G I 22].
- 18 TIE §54 [G I 20].
- 19 E4p35c1: "There is no singular thing in Nature that is more useful to man than a man who lives according to the guidance of reason."
- 20 Spinoza denies the possibility of a community of humans and animals because he takes these to be different in nature.
- 21 TIE §58 [G I 22].
- 22 E2p18s.
- 23 Cf. KV, I, ch. vi, §7 [G I 43].
- 24 Cf. KV, II, ch. iii, §8 [G I 58].
- 25 Cf. KV, II, ch. v, §2 [G I 62].

## Part III

# Moral Philosophy





## Spinoza on Good and Bad

Steven Nadler

One of the more common claims made about Spinoza's philosophy is that he is a subjectivist, perhaps even an emotivist, about moral and other values. On this reading, things in the world are no more *really* good or bad—i.e., good or bad independent of how they are regarded by human minds—than they are *really* painful, hot, beautiful, or colored. For Spinoza, this story goes, the denomination of things as “good” or “bad” (or “right” or “wrong”) is only a projective expression of desire, passion, or ideas of the imagination onto the external world.

Of course, it is true that, throughout his philosophical career, Spinoza is consistent in insisting that nothing is good or bad in itself—not nature as a whole, and not anything in nature. There are no values embedded in the world. Nothing exists for the sake of some higher purpose or end, and nothing, considered on its own, is better or worse than any other thing. Whatever is just is, period. In Spinoza's metaphysics, all things necessarily exist and act by the laws of Nature (*Deus sive Natura*). There are no individuals or objects or states of affairs in nature that are, intrinsically and without relationship to anything else, good.

But if being good is not an intrinsic feature of things—something that, like their dimensions or internal structure, they possess independent of whatever else may be the case—then what is its status? What is it for something to be good (or bad)? This is a point on which there is some significant disagreement among scholars. In this chapter, I take issue with that prevalent “subjectivist”<sup>1</sup> tendency in reading Spinoza's account of good. According to the different versions of this interpretation, something's being good is nothing but a matter of opinion, a human “construction,” an expression of desire, a form of “prejudice,” and even

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a confusion in the minds of the untutored. I argue, on the other hand, that the qualities good and bad for Spinoza are, if not real and intrinsic “affections” [*affectiones*] of things in the world, nonetheless objective and (in a sense) mind-independent, albeit relational, features of them. What makes something good in the most basic sense is that it is the cause of a positive passive affect (passion, [*passio*]) in an individual; that is, it causes an increase in that individual’s *conatus*, or power of acting. Correlatively, something is bad if it is the cause of a negative passive affect in an individual, of a decrease in that individual’s power. And what makes something good in the truest and fullest sense of the term is that it so improves the power of an individual as to bring it closer to the ideal condition of its nature—in the case of human beings, it helps one become more like the “more perfect human being” that is, in Spinoza’s words, the “exemplar of human nature.”

Spinoza could not be more forthright and unambiguous about his view that good and bad are not real and intrinsic features of things, qualities that characterize things “taken by themselves” and independent of any relation to something else. It is, in fact, something that formed an important part of his thinking from the very start of his philosophical career. In the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, Spinoza notes right at the beginning of the work, as he reflects on the various pursuits of his youth and his career as a merchant, that “all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as [my] mind was moved by them” [TIE, §1/C I 7/G II 5]. Nothing “considered in its own nature” [*in sua natura spectatum*], he claims, is good or bad [TIE, §12/C I 10/G II 8].

This view finds a more perspicuous geometrical presentation in the *Ethics*. In the Preface to *Ethics* Part 4, which contains Spinoza’s most important and detailed presentation of his view of good and bad, he says that:

As far as good and bad are concerned, they also indicate nothing positive in things, considered in themselves, nor are they anything other than modes of thinking, *or* notions we form because we compare things to one another. [E4pr/C I 545/G II 208]

Spinoza is apparently moved to emphasize, repeatedly, this point about the ontological status of good and bad because of a habitual mistake made by most (i.e., non-philosophical) people. The “ignorant,” he says in E1app, typically attribute normative qualities to things in their own right. They consider these “modes of imagining, by which the imagination is variously affected” to be “the chief attributes of things ... and call a thing good or bad, sound or rotten, as they are affected by it” [C I 445/G II 82]. Much as the common folk project sensory

qualities in the mind (like color or warmth) onto objects themselves, so they are convinced that these other “modes of thinking” really characterize things as well.

The passages above, with their claims that good and bad are only “modes of thinking,” “modes of imagining,” “notions,” or “beings of reason” seem to suggest that Spinoza believes that something is good or bad only because someone *regards* it as good or bad, and that there is nothing more to its goodness or badness than this personal assessment—in other words, that its goodness is solely in the eye of the beholder. While other beholders may or may not happen to agree with that assessment, there is no way to demonstrate or justify the truth of the assessment in a publicly accessible way. This is because there really is no “truth” of the matter beyond a personal one, no more than it is “true” that vanilla is the best flavor of ice cream.

The comparison Spinoza draws in the Preface of Part 4 between the notions of good and bad and other evaluative concepts (such as “perfect” and “imperfect”) reinforces the impression that this is his view. Nothing, he claims, is, in itself, perfect or imperfect. Again, whatever is just is. Products of human artisanship—works produced by various crafts and arts—are regarded as more or less perfect according to how well they match up either with the artisan-maker’s original intention or with some individual’s conception of what an ideal specimen of that kind of thing should be.

Because one person’s ideal of a certain kind of thing may be different from another person’s ideal of that kind of thing, the former’s judgment about what is or is not “perfect” will differ from the latter’s. If two people have different “universal ideas” about what a house or a table or ice cream should be, they will arrive at different evaluative judgments about how perfect this or that house or table or ice cream is. These judgments are really nothing more than their respective opinions based on highly subjective, variable, even arbitrary criteria.

Similarly, natural things, “which have not been made by human hand,” are judged to be more or less perfect only because of the common (but false) belief that nature, like art, is teleological, that it acts in purposive ways to achieve certain ends. A withered tree is in fact an “imperfect” tree only in the mind of the perceiver, who has a certain conception of what a tree is and how nature should function. The conclusion that Spinoza draws is that “men are accustomed to call natural things perfect or imperfect more from prejudice than from true knowledge of those things” [E4pr/C I 544/G II 206].

For Spinoza, then, perfect and imperfect are wholly subjective notions and do nothing more than express individual and idiosyncratic opinion. They have their source in and are valid for only the person making the judgment. Something

is perfect or imperfect *only* if someone believes it to be so; its perfection or imperfection consists only in his believing it to be so; it is perfect only for him and in his eyes; and he will believe it to be so only because he has come up with some general but highly personal conception of what that thing *should* be.

These and other passages about perfection and goodness from the *Ethics* might suggest that for Spinoza good and bad are no less subjective than perfection and imperfection, and for the same reasons. His statement that good and bad “*also* indicate nothing positive in things” (my emphasis) comes immediately after his deflationary discussion of perfection. In the all-important Appendix to *Ethics* Part I, where Spinoza explains the ramifications for religion of his metaphysics of God or Nature, he notes that:

After men persuaded themselves that everything that happens, happens on their account, they had to judge that what is most important in each thing is what is most useful to them, and to rate as most excellent all those things by which they were most pleased. Hence, they had to form these notions, by which they explained natural things: *good, bad, order, confusion, warm, cold, beauty, ugliness*. [E1app/C I 444/G II 81]

The comparison in this passage with sensory qualities, like warmth and coldness, and with aesthetic judgments might seem telling. Evaluations of good and bad, it would appear, are no less personal and idiosyncratic than the undeniably personal and idiosyncratic judgments about how something sensibly feels or aesthetically looks. No one who is well enough informed scientifically would argue that the qualitative, felt warmth of water or the perceived “ugliness” of some creature’s visage is really in the thing itself. Similarly, no one should believe that goodness is really out there in the world—or so Spinoza might appear to be saying.

The idea, then, would be that something is good if and only if a person believes it to be good. Or, since one may experience approval of thing without necessarily having any firm beliefs about it—perhaps one simply has a good feeling or some other affective attitude toward the thing without really *believing* anything about it—it might be better to substitute for “believes” the phrase “pro-attitude.” This can refer to any number of ways of experiencing approval of something. It may be through a belief about the thing, but it might, alternatively, involve being drawn to it in a non-cognitive manner, such as through affectionate desire. A person may find that he simply likes or approves of something without having any particular beliefs about it.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the claim under discussion is better put by saying that for Spinoza something is good if and only if a person has

a pro-attitude toward it. On this account, the person's pro-attitude toward or endorsement of the thing is all there is to its goodness, whatever may be the cause of this pro-attitude.

In light of his claims about the non-intrinsic nature of the goodness of things, then, and his desire to dispel the notion that the world is imbued with values, Spinoza appears on the face of it to go to the opposite extreme and to treat good and bad (like perfection and imperfection) as thoroughly subjective, as imaginary, misleading, and even pernicious fictions that, when projected onto nature as if they are objective features of it, can deceive us into superstitious religious belief.

Now there is for Spinoza a very close relationship between what effect a thing has on a person and what is good. There is also an intimate connection between what a person desires and what is good. And yet, it would be a mistake to think that Spinoza is prepared to regard good and bad as solely mind-dependent—or, on a more extreme reading, to think that he is willing to dismiss them as subjective imaginings, as “confusions” or “prejudices” common among the untutored.<sup>3</sup> These evaluative notions may not refer to ontically real and intrinsic (i.e., non-relational) features that characterize things absolutely and “in themselves.” However, for Spinoza, the goodness or badness of some thing or action *is* a non-mind-dependent objective matter of fact—albeit a relational fact—about that thing.<sup>4</sup> When, unlike the ignorant masses, we judge rightly about such things, our evaluations capture certain truths about the world and not just truths about what we think.

To sort things out, let us begin with a survey of the several different kinds of statements that Spinoza makes about good and bad in the *Ethics*. Here they are in their order of appearance, starting with what he says in Part 3, which is devoted to “the Origin and Nature of the Affects”:

- (1) It is clear that we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it.<sup>5</sup> [E3p9s]

He repeats this idea thirty propositions later, adding some more detail to the account:

- (2) By good here I understand every kind of Joy, and whatever leads to it, and especially what satisfies any kind of longing, whatever that may be. And by bad [I understand here] every kind of Sadness, and especially what frustrates longing. For we have shown above (in E3p9s) that we desire nothing because

we judge it to be good, but on the contrary, we call it good because we desire it. Consequently, what we are averse to we call bad. So each one, from his own affect, judges or evaluates, what is good and what is bad, what is better and what is worse, and finally, what is best and what is worst. [E3p39s]

We seem in these passages still to be in the realm of a kind of subjectivism: goodness is a function of someone having a pro-attitude toward or in some way expressing an endorsement of a thing. Something is good because someone desires it, and it is good only for that person and only as long as she desires it. Or, as the point is made in passage (2), something is good if it causes joy in a person or satisfies some desire she has. Apparently, it does not matter what kind of desire is at stake or what it is a desire for. If something causes joy or pleasure in a person, they will desire it and judge it to be good; and the goodness of the thing consists in nothing more than its being so desired and so judged. Or so it might seem from these passages.<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, Spinoza's considered position in the *Ethics* is *not* a reduction of good and bad to a matter of personal approbation. To see that this is so, let us turn to some additional passages, and especially the discussion of good and bad in Part 4. From these texts, we should be able to see that, for Spinoza, it is absolutely *not* the case that something is good simply and solely because someone believes it to be good, or desires it, or has some kind of positive feeling about it—although it *is* the case that *if* something is good, then there will be, in the person for whom it is good, a pro-attitude toward it. Here are some of the relevant passages:

- (3) By good I shall understand what we certainly know to be useful to us. [E4d1]; By bad, however, I shall understand what we certainly know prevents us from being masters of some good. [E4d2]
- (4) We call good, or bad, what is useful to, or harmful to, preserve our being (by E4d1 and E4d2), i.e. (by E3p7) what increases or diminishes, aids or restrains, our power of acting. Therefore (by the Definitions of Joy and Sadness in E3p11s), insofar as we perceive that a thing affects us with Joy or Sadness, we call it good or bad. And so knowledge of good and bad is nothing but an idea of Joy or Sadness which follows necessarily from the affect of Joy or Sadness itself (by E2p22). [E4p8d]
- (5) Insofar as a thing agrees with our nature, it is necessarily good. [E3p31]
- (6) Nothing, therefore, can be good except insofar as it agrees with our nature. So the more a thing agrees with our nature, the more useful it is, and conversely, q.e.d. [E4p31c]

- (7) Those things are good which bring about the preservation of the proportion of motion and rest the human body's parts have to one another; on the other hand, those things are bad which bring it about that the parts of the human body have a different proportion of motion and rest to one another. [E4p39]
- (8) Since those things are good which assist the parts of the Body to perform their function, and Joy consists in the fact that man's power, insofar as he consists of Mind and Body, is aided or increased, all things that bring Joy are good. [E4app30]
- (9) I shall understand by good what we know certainly is a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves. By bad, what we certainly know prevents us from becoming like that model. [E4pr]

The first thing to note about these passages is that they are not all about the same thing. Some concern our beliefs or judgments about what is good and bad. Others are statements about the goodness or badness of things or actions—they are claims about what makes something good or bad. And at least one of the passages (4) seems to be primarily about linguistic usage. These are distinct issues and should not be confused. The statements about the judgments we make concerning good and bad, like the claims from Part 3 (in passages (1) and (2)), do not, by themselves, say or imply that what makes something good or bad is that we desire it. At the same time, it may turn out that we do always desire (and hence judge to be good) what is in fact and in some way, more or less, good. That is, desire (and, consequently, judgment) may track goodness, at least as it is possessed to some degree or another by things. Or the situation may be more restricted than this, and that it is only when desire is properly informed by knowledge that what we, consequent to desire, judge to be good really *is* good. This is what needs to be investigated.

I am confident that, in the end, all of this fits together into a single coherent account.

So, what exactly makes something good (or bad)? In passages (3) through (9), as well as numerous other texts, Spinoza offers what seem initially to be different responses to this question. He claims that what is good is what is “useful” to an individual; what “preserves our being”; what “increases” or “aids ... our power of acting”; what “agrees with our nature”; what “brings joy”; what is “a means by which we may approach nearer and nearer to the model of human nature that we set before ourselves”; and what “assists the parts of the Body to perform their function” or preserves the proportion of motion and rest between its parts. In



fact, as we shall see, these all amount to basically the same thing. Understanding this, however, demands that we bear in mind Spinoza's account of human nature, and especially his explanation of the affects that constitute the dominant feature of our mental lives and the desire that accompanies them.

The emotions [*affectus*] are the active and passive ways in which the mind and the body of an individual undergo changes—in particular, changes in that individual's "power of acting" [*potentia agendi*] or "force of existing" [*vis existendi*—i.e., in its *conatus* or "striving." *Conatus* is the motivational force that lies at the root of all a person's endeavors. In the human mind, it is the conscious aversion to things that might weaken it and the conscious striving after those things that (as far as it can tell) promote its well-being and preserve and increase its power.

An affect just *is* any such change in an individual's power of acting or *conatus*, whether for better or for worse. It is either the move from a better condition to a worse condition or the improvement to a better condition. These increases or decreases in an individual's power can come about either through the action of external things—these are the passive affects or passions—or from within.

Finally, Spinoza believes that there are in fact three primary passive affects: joy, sadness, and desire. Desire is the *conatus* or power itself, as it appears in the conscious mind. Joy [*laetitia*] is "that passion by which the mind passes to a greater perfection." Sadness [*tristitia*], on the other hand, is "that passion by which [the mind] passes to a lesser perfection" [E3p11s].

Now we now know that every individual, by its nature, strives to persevere; and that what this involves is an effort to maintain, and even increase, its *conatus* or power of acting—it is, in essence, a striving to increase its power of striving. In fact, every individual is nothing but such a *conatus* or striving to persevere. What passages (3) through (8) show is that something is good, truly good, if and only if it aids the individual in its striving or helps it increase its power of acting or contributes to the preservation of its being—all of these being one and the same thing. And because something that helps an individual in its striving to persevere is certainly "useful" to that individual (in that respect), what is good can also be described as what is useful to an individual. Moreover, because *conatus* just is an individual's essence or nature, what is useful to that individual, hence what is good, is what "agrees with [that individual's] nature." Finally, since the passion of joy is defined as an externally caused increase in an individual's power of acting, something that causes joy in an individual is also, by that fact, good. As Spinoza succinctly puts it in Part 3: "By good here I understand every kind of joy and whatever leads to it" [E3p39s].

This is Spinoza's account of what makes something good. Something is good if it is a cause of joy, that is, if it contributes to an individual's striving to persevere,

to its effort to maintain and even increase its power. Correlatively, something is bad if it is a cause of pain/sadness, that is, if it hinders this striving or weakens an individual's power. Of course, some things contribute in a temporary and small-scale manner to an individual's power. These would be sources of minor or partial joy, and thus good in a very limited sense. Eating a rich and fattening meal with many sweet desserts might be momentarily pleasant and thus be a cause of some positive passive affect. At the same time, these short-term sources of partial joy typically have deleterious long-term consequences, and so they do not constitute true and lasting goods; in the end, they bring a decrease in power. Real goods are those that bring a more permanent increase in power of greater scope, a more lasting joy to a greater part of us and even to our whole being.

This account is clearly consistent with Spinoza's repeated claim that nothing is good in itself, on its own, or "considered in its own nature," since nothing is good except insofar as it is a cause of joy in some individual, insofar as it is useful to that individual and aids it in its striving.

What this means, then, is that something's being good is certainly *not* a subjective affair; the goodness of something is not reducible to someone having a pro-attitude toward it (although if something is good and is experienced as a source of joy, then that person *will* have a pro-attitude or desire toward it). Relativism is not subjectivism. If something "aids or restrains" an individual's power of acting, its *conatus*, if it is a cause of a positive passive affect, this is an objective, non-mind-dependent matter of fact. It is a *relational* (not an absolute or intrinsic) matter of fact about the thing, but an objective matter of fact nonetheless. Similarly, being soluble in water is an objective, non-mind-dependent feature of salt—it is independent of anyone's beliefs about or attitude toward salt and its relationship to water. It is not, however, an intrinsic and absolute (non-relational) feature of salt, since it is dependent as well on the chemical constitution of water and the interaction between the two. It may be the case that someone's believing or wanting a thing to be useful to them might contribute to its actually being useful; this would be something interesting for psychology to investigate. But whether or not the thing does indeed turn out to be useful is not reducible to the person's believing or wanting it to be useful.

We still confront one final puzzle, however: Passage (9), from the *Ethics*, which seems to be the odd man out among our passages above. Passage (9) *could* be seen as providing hope for one who wants to find a kind of subjectivism lurking in Spinoza's account of what is good. This is because (9), from the Preface to Part 4, links goodness to the immediately preceding discussion of perfection, and perfection really does seem to be a subjective affair: something is perfect

or imperfect only with respect to some ideal model that a person may have in mind. Not only do such models vary from one person to the next, depending upon their beliefs or experience, but if no one actually conceives the model and undertakes the mental activity of making the comparison, then there is no perfection. “Therefore,” Spinoza concludes, “perfection and imperfection are only modes of thinking, i.e., notions we are accustomed to feign because we compare individuals of the same species or genus to one another” [E4pr, C I 545/G II 207]. Following up on this, passage (9) says that good and bad also involve a comparative measure with respect to some model.

The “model of human nature” would seem, on the face of it, to be no different from the other kinds of models with reference to which things are judged to be more or less perfect: the model table, the model tree, the model giraffe, the model ice cream (the *lactis gelidi exemplar*). In this case, judgments about good and bad would appear to be no less subjective than judgments about perfection. It could still be an objective matter of fact whether or not something does or does not help one achieve or come closer to the ideal condition specified in the model. But the subjectivity and arbitrariness of the ideal itself would, presumably, infect the whole edifice. A thing either does or does not help a person become more like the model that he may have in mind as the ideal human being, and this is not subjective—what one may believe or feel about it has no bearing. But if the relevant model human being, no less than the model tree or the ideal ice cream, were subjective—if it were an idiosyncratic matter specific to that person and his experience, values, desires, etc.—then so, too, would be the goodness or badness of thing under consideration, since whether or not that thing is good depends ultimately on the highly personal, even arbitrary choice of model.

However, Spinoza’s metaphysics does allow him to say that there is in fact an objective, non-arbitrary determination of what constitutes a more perfect or ideal human being, that is, a “model of human nature” [*naturae humanae exemplar*] for which all individual human beings strive, at least in principle, if not consciously.<sup>7</sup> It is the human being that is most successful in its striving for perseverance, the human being of maximal *conatus*—what Spinoza will, as of E4p66s, call the “free man” [*homo liber*]. If every individual is, essentially and by its nature, striving to maintain its being and even increase its power, then this condition of maximal power is the ideal state toward which every individual naturally and necessarily—i.e., objectively and by its nature—strives. A tree is striving to be a maximally powerful tree, and a giraffe is striving to be a maximally powerful giraffe. A human being, in turn, is striving to be a maximally powerful human being, and it is precisely such a successfully striving human being that

the “model of human nature” is supposed to capture. In this way, the model is no mere subjective ideal but anchored in the metaphysical reality of things.<sup>8</sup>

This model of human nature allows us to make sense of yet another initially puzzling distinction that Spinoza makes, between “the knowledge of good and bad” and what he calls the “true knowledge of good and bad.” If something brings about a small-scale improvement in one’s being, an increase in his or her power in this or that respect of their mind and body, then it is a cause of joy, and thus “good”; and one’s belief that it is good is not without justification. However, as we have seen, this improvement or joy may be only partial, temporary, and short-lived. The “true knowledge of good and bad,” by contrast, refers to informed beliefs about those things that bring about full and lasting improvements in one’s condition—i.e., things that truly do move one closer, in one’s overall being, to the model of human nature.

There thus seems to be no getting around the fact that, despite occasional language that suggests that good and bad are only in the mind of the beholder, given what Spinoza says about *conatus* and the ways in which things can help an individual in its striving, it is a matter of fact, causally independent of any antecedent mental attitudes, that something is or is not good. This is a feature of Spinoza’s thought that endures from the very first paragraph of his extant writings—where, in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, he says that “the true good” is that which “would continuously give me the greatest joy” and is the means toward acquiring “a human nature much stronger and more enduring than his own”—to his mature masterpiece, the *Ethics*.

## Notes

- 1 Let me here express the necessary caveat that it is notoriously difficult to come up with a useful and unambiguous definition of “subjectivism,” one that does justice to the various ways in which some quality (moral or otherwise) might be “mind-dependent.” See: Richard Joyce, “Moral Anti-Realism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Summer 2009 Edition). Available online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/moral-anti-realism/>; Gideon Rosen, “Objectivity and modern idealism: What is the question?” in *Philosophy in Mind*, ed. Michaelis Michael and John O’Leary-Hawthorne (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1994). Thus, I generally avoid such jargon in this chapter, although when I do use the terms “subjective” and “objective” I hope that my discussion makes my meaning clear.
- 2 Actually, moral subjectivism as a meta-ethical position could be put even more abstractly than this: that the standards that determine whether something is good

are fixed by each individual, and they could be anything—not necessarily personal approval, liking, or endorsement. My thanks to my meta-ethicist colleague Russ Shafer-Landau for his help in this matter.

- 3 Melamed argues that for Spinoza the notions of good and bad are “prejudices” that are among the “errors, illusions, and misconceptions” that characterize ordinary (i.e., non-philosophically enlightened) thinking about the world. See Yitzhak Y. Melamed, “Spinoza’s Anti-Humanism: An Outline,” in *The Rationalists: Between Tradition and Innovation*, ed. Carlos Fraenkel, Dario Perinetti, and Justin E. H. Smith (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011). Similarly, Harvey claims that for Spinoza “good and bad... are notions that arise only as a result of the act of the imagination,” and hence “the question of what things are to be considered good or bad is at bottom a subjective one, that is, that it is relative to our own intents, targets, and *exemplaria*.” See Warren Zev Harvey, “A Portrait of Spinoza as a Maimonidean,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 19 (1981): 158.
- 4 Of course, even if the goodness of something is completely mind-dependent in the subjectivist manner, it may still be an objective matter of fact. That is, it will be a fact that *x* is good, but a fact that is dependent upon someone’s having the relevant pro-attitude toward *x*. My claim is not just that Spinoza thinks that something’s being good is an objective state of affairs, but that he believes that that objective state of affairs is not primarily and directly dependent on some person having an attitude one way or the other. For a discussion of the complexity and difficulty of specifying what exactly being “mind-dependent” involves in the moral context, see Joyce, “Moral Anti-Realism.”
- 5 This represents a clear and significant reversal of the account of the relationship between desire and good that Spinoza had offered in the *Short Treatise*. In that earlier work, Spinoza had claimed that a person desires something *because* he has judged it to be good, not (as he argues in the *Ethics*) vice versa [C I 121/G I 80]. It is possible that what changed Spinoza’s mind was his reading of what Hobbes had to say on this topic in *De Cive*, *De Homine*, and in Part One of *Leviathan*, which Spinoza read in either its Dutch (1667) or Latin (1668) translation. For a discussion of this reversal, see Emanuela Scribano, “La connaissance du bien et du mal: Du *Court Traité à l’Éthique*,” in *Spinoza transalpin*, ed. Chantal Jaquet and Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2012).
- 6 That these passages are at least suggestive of emotivism, an extreme form of subjectivism, has been noted by Don Garrett in “Spinoza’s Ethical Theory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 287. See also: William K. Frankena, “Spinoza’s ‘New Morality’: Notes on Book IV,” in *Spinoza: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Eugene Freedman (La Salle: Open Court, 1975); Frédéric Manzini, *Spinoza: Une lecture d’Aristote* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009); Ruth Mattern, “Spinoza

and Ethical Subjectivism,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 8, supplement 1, “Rationalism and Empiricism”: 59–82; and Andrew Youpa, “Spinoza’s Theories of Value,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2010): 209–229.

- 7 This does not imply that all human beings consciously have such a model in mind. The greedy person, for example, may not realize that his desire for money is ultimately a (falsely guided) desire to increase his power of persevering to the maximal condition represented by the *exemplar*.
- 8 For a contrary view, see Charles Jarrett, “Spinozistic Constructivism,” in *Essays on Spinoza’s Ethical Theory*, ed. Matthew Kisner and Andrew Youpa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Jarrett argues that Spinoza’s ethics is a “constructivist” one, and that “the terms ‘good’ and ‘bad’... have no meaning except in virtue of the construction of a concept of an ideal person” (78), and that this concept is not objectively grounded in any essence or in the reality of things.

# A Response: The Knowledge of Good and Bad

Lorenzo Vinciguerra

The philosophy of Spinoza begins with the question of good and bad. It is by means of this question that Spinoza comes to philosophy at the beginning of the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*.<sup>1</sup> Again, it is with the question of the highest good and beatitude that the *Ethics* ends, after leading the way to it through its demonstrations. Nadler's contribution also deserves credit for moving beyond where interpreters will often stop, namely, the first stage of Spinoza's conception of good and bad. We may call this first stage "critical." It underscores Spinoza's relativism or subjectivism, according to which the notions of good and bad, as well as the notions of perfection and imperfection, are of a merely relative value: good and bad are only manners of thinking. However, although these notions do not refer to any reality as such, or we may say, although they do not say anything about the intrinsic nature of things, they are not nothing. Nadler is thus right not to be content with the *pars destruens* of the doctrine, and Spinoza's refusal to ontologize that which is bad. The critical part is but a decisive propaedeutic. It contributes in the effort to distinguish ethics from morals and to get rid of the problem of radical evil and its justification. Nonetheless, if we hope to understand the position that Spinoza develops on a classical question of philosophy since at least Socrates, it is insufficient.

In other words, what is good and what is bad is not only a matter of opinion or prejudice, nor even a simple expression of desire, even after the relationship of the knowledge of good and human appetite will have been reversed: "It is clear that we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything because we judge it to be good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it."<sup>2</sup> As "qualities," the notions of good and

bad, according to Nadler, would describe a kind of “objective reality,” something “mind-independent.” To make his case, Nadler judiciously expands his field of analysis to accommodate the entirety of the *Ethics*. He handily relies on a series of excerpts, grouped into nine separate theses, so many arguments taken directly from the text, all of which are intended to cover and even enlarge the scope of a doctrine more articulate than what we habitually believe. Indeed, the anchoring in the affects and in desire makes it possible to think about good and bad in a way which is not simply or only relativistic. The good’s relation to desire opens the field of investigation onto a conception of good involving a certain objectivity, capable of being universalized, since it is based on the possibility of reaching a sure knowledge of what is *truly* useful to us. Reoriented in this way, the question of good and bad touches on the knowledge of universal laws which govern desire in view of its objects. Taken back up with respect to “the cause of the increase or decrease of an individual’s power of acting,” it is then possible to reread the new definitions of *bonum* and *malum* that Spinoza gives at the beginning of Part 4 of the *Ethics* as opening onto a new, positive doctrine of variations of power. Hence, without referring to an ontological reality unto itself, good and bad cover a relational reality which is equally well an objective reality to the degree that good and bad are mind-independent. In the full sense of the term, good is whatever increases one’s individual power to perfect his nature. Behind the relativity of values, we find here a certain universal objectivity of that which is good and bad.

The following remarks do not call into question either the merits or the interest of this enlightening reading. I have no substantial disagreement with it. I would, rather, look to further reflect on some issues.

Broadly speaking, with regard to the dialogue between the North American and French schools of Spinoza scholarship, it is worth indicating that the rigor of the argumentative method specific to the internalist reading of texts as demonstrated in the approach of Nadler is not foreign to French Spinoza scholarship. The latter, let it be recalled, remains marked by the important commentary of Martial Gueroult<sup>3</sup> and the reinterpretation of Spinoza’s system proposed by Alexandre Matheron.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Nadler’s individuation of nine theses that illustrate, in miniature, the different aspects of Spinoza’s position would greatly appeal to anyone attentive to the logical structure of a text like the *Ethics*. Nonetheless, as shown at the beginning of *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, the ethical journey, as it is experienced, is far from being linear or straight. Rather, more often it is tortuous, even labyrinthine. Is it not true that before composing *more geometrico* his *Ethics*, Spinoza himself wandered in search of uncertain goods, longing for his salvation? After many deceptions and disappointments, he then finally faced up to the reality



of his desire and his incapacity to establish a *novum institutum*. In Spinoza's first text, good and bad advanced masked, so to speak, and only unveil themselves once desire and its veritable object have become better known.

But to find one's path, one must seek after it. To seek it, one must have lost it. Experience seems to lead to such a situation sooner or later, in that it makes us aware of the vanity of our old ways. This quest and its accompanying inquiry are likely to succeed only if they rally all of one's forces, Spinoza suggested. Such a task cannot be satisfied by mere proofs of thought. It comes with experience, it is forged and molded by an experiential itinerary. Although the temporal and historical dimension is not entirely absent from Nadler's reflection, it is for the most part left in the background without being really explored or treated thematically. His argument is suspended, so to speak, within the logical framework extracted from Spinoza. However, as is shown by Spinoza's earliest narrative, the experience of good and bad is a prelude to philosophical life. Good and bad are certainly relative *notions*, but the affects of sadness and despair, to mention only those two, are entirely real for ethical purposes. Likewise, the nine theses accounted for by Nadler, which are like doctrinal landmarks that help us orient ourselves in the cartography of the *Ethics*, ought to look to accommodate the temporal and even existential dimension of Spinoza's thought that accounts for our ethical life from the point of view of its becoming. Such was the approach adopted by Pierre-François Moreau, whose interpretation focuses on the experiential dimension of Spinoza's philosophy, a philosophy which is indeed as admirable for its coherence as for its power of abstraction.<sup>5</sup> The point of such an alternative approach is not to contradict the virtues of the so-called architectonic approach, but, rather, to confirm them in shedding light on Spinoza's system from within it by appealing to the experience of the person that inhabits it.

Nadler's contribution shows that Spinozist relativism is not exhausted under the heading of "subjectivism." He further shows that the relativity of desire is based on a kind of qualitative objectivity that is likely to emerge from the diversity of the values and morals that humans can embrace. Despite cultural differences, the question of good and bad remains a universal anthropological query. The multiplicity of uses and customs are not an obstacle to the ethical theory, but, rather, prepare it in virtue of their inherent contradictions. At the same time, once grounded in Spinoza's philosophy of power, the objectivity of good differs from any abstract universalism. Yet Spinoza conceives an ethical theory that is valid and useful for all humans, anytime and anywhere. Thus, Nadler's chapter gives us the instruments necessary to distinguish relativism from subjectivism, on the one hand, and objectivity from universality on the other, all the while preparing a possible articulation between the relativism of values and a relational and objective conception of good.

That being said, one must wonder about a proposition that did not entirely find its place in Nadler's cartography of arguments (the nine theses). I am thinking of Spinoza's claim that "knowledge of evil is an inadequate knowledge,"<sup>6</sup> furthered by his claim that "if men were born free, they would form no concept of good and evil so long as they remained [*essent*] free."<sup>7</sup> Reading these passages, one is entitled to believe that the experience of freedom is situated beyond good and bad, or that, at the very least, it tends to free us from these notions. It is therefore important to distinguish between the *true* knowledge of good and bad and the *adequate* knowledge of good and bad. We can see that they do not amount to the same thing if we keep in mind that "no affect can be restrained by the true knowledge of good and evil [*vera boni et mali cognitio*] insofar as it is true [*quatenus vera*],"<sup>8</sup> as Spinoza was the first to experience, and moreover, if we note that though there can a true knowledge of good and bad, there is, however, no adequate knowledge of bad. For the same reason, one can ask whether we need to dismiss the possibility of an adequate knowledge of good as well. Since this aspect of the question remains hidden in the background, it would be interesting to explore further this difference between true knowledge and adequate knowledge with regard to the good and bad binary, perhaps as a means of trying to free ourselves from the apparent Manichean dualisms in which one fatally ends up finding oneself when opposing relative and the universal, subjective and objective, passive and active, or good and bad. In other words, one might ask if according to the "objectivist" perspective put forward by Nadler it is still possible to maintain a perfect symmetry within the good and bad binary.

In effect, while on the path of ethical progress, would it not be appropriate to positively consider, *as much as we can*, that which we call "bad," "sadness," or a "decrease of power"? Are these not to be treated like so opportunities for us to exercise our understanding and thereby augment our power of acting? In this sense, *objectively* speaking, there would only be "good," and bad would remain merely subjective, relative, partial, and, briefly put, imaginative, if not purely imaginary. *Everything* may not be good, but anything, when related to the totality of substance, expresses a positive degree of its power: "By reality and perfection I understand the same thing."<sup>9</sup> Despite this, one might object, should we not consider that insofar as sadness is a *transition* to a state of lesser perfection, it is still "bad," and irreducibly so? Doubt can arise, especially in virtue of the fact that relating that which is bad to God as to its cause would imply the possibility to hate God. Spinoza categorically excludes this possibility, just like the love toward God cannot turn into its opposite.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, since

we understand God as the cause of all things, don't we thereby consider him as the cause of sadness? To that ultimate question, Spinoza replied: "Insofar as we understand the causes of sadness, it ceases to be a passion, i.e. ... to that extent it ceases to be sadness. And so, insofar as we understand God to be the cause of sadness, we rejoice."<sup>11</sup> In other words, "to the degree that" [*quatenus*], "as long as" [*quamdiu*], "as much as we can" [*quantum potest*] account for the production of adequate ideas, there is really only joy, and, in keeping with the terms in use, good. In this way, Spinoza pursues, and renews in his own manner, the tradition of ethical intellectualism, since if we understand things adequately, including our sadness, we are joyful. Not only is there no guilt or responsibility to be found for sadness, but the more it is known by us, the less we suffer from it. This is not a consolation, nor even a promise, but the result of a mathematics of affects.

## Notes

- 1 See TIE §1 [G II 5]: "After experience had taught me that all the things which regularly occur in ordinary life are empty and futile, and I saw that all the things which were the cause or object of my fear had nothing of good or bad in themselves, except insofar as [my] mind was moved by them, I resolved at last to try to find out whether there was anything which would be the true good, capable of communicating itself" [*Cum viderem omnia, a quibus, et quae timebam, nihil neque boni, neque mali in se habere, nisi quatenus ab iis animus movebatur, constitui tandem inquirere, an aliquid daretur, quod verum bonum, et sui communicabile esset.*].
- 2 E3p9s: "*constat [ ... ] nihil nos conari, velle, appetere, neque cupere, quia id bonum esse judicamus; sed contra nos, propterea aliquid bonum esse, judicare, quia id conamur, volumus, appetimus, atque cupimus.*"
- 3 See Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza, 1: Dieu* and *Spinoza, 2: L'âme* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968 and 1974).
- 4 See Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969).
- 5 See Pierre-François Moreau, *Spinoza: L'expérience et l'éternité* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994).
- 6 E4p64: "*Cognitio mali cognitio est inadaequata.*"
- 7 E4p68: "*Si homines nascerentur liberi, nullum boni, et mali formarent conceptum, quamdiu liberi essent.*" See also E4p68s.
- 8 E4p14.
- 9 E2d6: "*Per realitatem, et perfectionem idem intelligo.*"
- 10 See E5p18 and E5p18c.
- 11 See E5p18c and E5p18s.

## Generosity as Freedom in Spinoza's *Ethics*

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In this chapter, through attention to the virtue of generosity, I offer an alternative solution to the puzzle Daniel Garber presents in his 1994 paper on sociability and freedom in Spinoza's *Ethics*. Garber identifies a tension within Spinoza's doctrine, according to which (i) freedom is the ability to be an adequate cause of one's own actions and (ii) freedom entails the desire for friendship, society, and mutual aid.<sup>1</sup> Freedom as adequate causation seems to imply self-sufficiency, but Spinoza frequently links the desire for sociability to our unavoidable lack of self-sufficiency. In the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza observes that "it's futile for one person alone to try to protect himself from all others,"<sup>2</sup> and for this reason each of us intrinsically fears solitude.<sup>3</sup> In the *Ethics*, immediately after invoking the adage "Man is a God to Man," Spinoza's thoughts turn to the prosaic: "Men still find by experience that by helping each other they can provide themselves much more easily with the things they require, and that only by joining forces can they avoid the dangers which threaten on all sides."<sup>4</sup> Society thus appears to be a response to our vulnerability and finitude. Spinoza often frames the desire for society in negative terms, as a mode of protection from violence, the elements, and deprivation, which protection is necessary given the limited powers of individuals.<sup>5</sup>

But Spinoza also positively aligns freedom, rationality, and sociability throughout his writings. Spinoza asserts that one who exercises virtue—understood as the power and freedom proper to one's nature—necessarily strives for society and the well-being of others. "The good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men."<sup>6</sup> The guidance of reason directs each to persevere in her own being and, concomitantly, to pursue the shared enjoyment of common goods.<sup>7</sup> Despite Spinoza's multiple assertions that rationality entails sociability, Garber finds that he "has no real

arguments to that conclusion.”<sup>8</sup> Garber thus proposes the following: sociability, cooperation, and interdependence follow from one’s *desire for freedom*, but not from its attainment. While sociability is a necessary *means* to freedom, it is not a consequence of it. Since sociability involves dependency on others rather than self-sufficiency, on his account, it must express our neediness rather than our power.

Attention to generosity as an expression of freedom, I suggest, points toward a different way to dissolve the dilemma. It is certainly true that Spinoza often argues from our finitude to the necessity and indissolubility of social order in general. Nevertheless, need is not the only basis of sociability. Insofar as we are rational, free, and virtuous, we exercise hard-won social skills, such as generosity. Generosity, defined as the rational desire to aid other men and join them in friendship, is a powerful art of joining together with others that is no less difficult and rare than other practices of natural science. Generosity, I hope to show, is not best understood as an alliance of forces, necessary for mortal beings with limited time and skills. Sociability as generosity exceeds the realm of need and follows directly from our strength of character [*fortitudo*], because it expresses a positive power to overcome anti-social passions, such as hatred, envy, and the desire for revenge. Spinoza asserts that generous souls resist *and* overwhelm hostile forces and debilitating affects with wisdom, foresight, and love.<sup>9</sup> The sociability yielded by generosity, then, is not just a form of cooperation we need to survive and produce leisure for study and contemplation. Generosity is not a mere means but a positive expression of freedom, because it is the activity through which a strong soul (and body) transforms enemies into friends. It is not an expression of lack, but of an acquired power that infuses one’s social milieu with empowering love and joy, creating agreements in nature and power where they did not previously exist. Attention to generosity reveals not only that there are social virtues proper to Spinoza’s understanding of freedom but that freedom itself is, by necessity, social.

Difficulties of interpretation arise partly because Spinoza’s account of finite life as immanent and ineluctably relational implies that freedom is not a binary phenomenon, something we have or do not have, but something that complicates oppositions between activity and passivity, affecting and being affected. Attention to generosity helps address the complexity of freedom as both a product of necessity and as a matter of degree. Although I can only provide a small window into the full set of questions raised by consideration of the relationship between sociability and freedom, I will try to address two. The first is metaphysical, and is the primary source of concern for Garber. How can one be understood both

to act “from one’s nature alone” and to act with others? How can we reconcile adequate causation with acting through community [*convenientia*]? The second may be more phenomenological. The constellation of social virtues expressive of *fortitudo* that Spinoza names evoke self-limitation: generosity, modesty, clemency, and chastity. How do these traditionally Christian virtues cohere with Spinoza’s activist, or Machiavellian, conception of virtue? I will address these two issues in turn.

## I. Acting by Oneself with Others

Spinoza defines virtue as “power,” or “the very essence, or nature, of man, insofar as he has the power of bringing about certain things which can be understood *through the laws of his nature alone*.”<sup>10</sup> Since only substance acts absolutely without the concurrence of other causes, only God or Nature can be understood as entirely self-sufficient, as the exclusive cause of its effects. The complex individuals we call “humans” do not cause anything absolutely, but they do serve as “adequate causes” of some of their actions.<sup>11</sup> Spinoza stipulates that “I call that cause adequate whose effect can clearly and distinctly be perceived through it. But I call it partial, *or inadequate*, if its effect cannot be understood through it alone.”<sup>12</sup> Garber interprets human action to be adequate only if it is, in some sense, “causally isolated from the rest of the world,” such that one would affect others without being at the same time affected by them. Since finite beings are never entirely unaffected by others, they can only ever be partially free and rational. He suggests, therefore, that Spinoza’s figure of virtue—a man whose acts can be understood through the laws of his nature alone—must be an idealization.<sup>13</sup> When Spinoza attaches reason, freedom, and virtue to sociability—as he does with the notion of generosity—Garber suggests that we understand sociability as belonging to the *desire* for freedom rather than to its achievement.<sup>14</sup>

There can be no question that sociability serves as a condition of possibility for freedom, virtue, and reason. We are born radically dependent, ignorant, and highly susceptible to the aleas of fortune. We would not live without the ministrations of our caretakers who themselves could not provide nourishment or induce in us enabling passions without a more or less elaborate network of social relations. We require education, political order, and a division of labor to become the kinds of beings who are increasingly “conscious of [ourselves], God, and things.”<sup>15</sup> Certainly, there would be no freedom, no power to produce effects

that follow from our natures, without sociality. Sociability is a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition of freedom. We cannot become free all by ourselves. Infants raised by wolves, who are harshly abused or severely deprived, do not develop those powers that enable them to do what follows from “the laws” of a nature Spinoza would describe as human. Nevertheless, Spinoza is not being imprecise when he asserts that sociability is also a result of virtue. Indeed, generosity is an example of how acting “solely under the guidance of reason” entails sociability directly.

Generosity appears at the end of Part 3 of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, in his discussion of active affects. While human life is invariably characterized by subjection to the passions and to the common order of Nature,<sup>16</sup> we necessarily strive, with more or less success, to do those things that follow from and enhance our particular natures.<sup>17</sup> But what does it mean to do what “follows from one’s nature?” Must one be absolute—unconnected and untied to anything else—in order to act, according to Spinoza? I do not think so. In fact, we could not act if we were alone or absolved of relations with others. Human activity is not the pure self-activity of God or Nature as a whole. We produce active affects (or act) insofar as we have bodies and (thus also) minds ordered in such a way that they can produce effects from their own resources. In other words, as I understand Spinoza, active affects express virtue because they are activities that follow from a relationship of forces *within* a composite individual as well as those powers that “agree with” that individual’s nature. An active affect, he tells us, is always related to joy or desire,<sup>18</sup> which means that it indicates an amplification of our power. Rather than explaining an increase in one’s power to think and act by a fortunate encounter with external forces—such as the uplift in mood delivered by the warm sun—active affects must be explained by a favorable change in one’s ability to think and act that the virtuous agent produces from her “own” resources, but what counts as one’s own includes “external” powers that preserve and enhance one’s vitality and power.<sup>19</sup> Spinoza describes very few active affects, but among them is generosity.

Generosity is defined as a desire to aid others and join them to oneself in friendship that is guided *solely* by reason. Since reason is its exclusive cause, generosity should be understood as an expression of virtue, or power, which follows from the laws of one’s nature alone.<sup>20</sup> Spinoza calls desire the “essence” of man, but a human’s essence (or nature) is not typically guided by reason alone: “The essence of the mind is constituted by adequate and by inadequate ideas.”<sup>21</sup> We strive to think and act from confusion and imagination as well as from clarity and understanding. But when we desire from understanding, we

express *fortitudo*, strength of character or mind, which, Spinoza tells us, is distinguished by particular active affects: *animositas* and *generositas*. *Animositas* names the desire spurred by reason to persevere and aims at the agent's good [*utile*].<sup>22</sup> Spinoza's dictates of reason clearly link virtue to the desire to persevere in being, and so there is nothing puzzling about courage, or the intelligent desire to persevere, being proper to strength of character. We might note, however, that Spinoza defines the agent's good, or *utile*, as whatever enables the body to affect others and *to be affected*, in increasingly many ways.<sup>23</sup> The power of the agent, for Spinoza, unambiguously includes a power of receptivity as well as a power of assertion. The good, power, and virtue of an actor are his or her power to coordinate with others, to join forces, and to be transformed in enabling ways by other modes in nature. Spinoza's general rule that our minds grow in sophistication as our bodies become capable of being disposed in increasingly many ways further underlines how susceptibility to connection is a key feature of a finite mode's agency.<sup>24</sup> If what we need in order to think and act more powerfully is an increasingly complex power of receptivity, then causal isolation, or even independence more generally, is not an apt regulative ideal for becoming free. And neither does causal isolation, or radical independence, provide a picture of what it is to be free. Finite modes are not substance(s). Our freedom is not and should not strive to be absolute, unhinged from society and social relations.

When we conceive of courageous striving as a desire to persevere through affecting and disposing oneself toward being affected in enabling ways, reason's compulsion toward generosity may seem less paradoxical. Spinoza asserts that the agent of virtue is moved by reason [*ex solo rationis dictamine*] to aid other men and join with them in friendship. He doesn't describe generosity primarily as a receptive power, so we ought not understand courage as the active side of reason's striving in contrast to generosity as the passive side. Both *animositas* and *generositas* are active affects, or what a strong-minded character does by virtue of that strength. Generosity follows from the mind insofar as it understands. It does not merely provide the conditions amenable to understanding. Rather, generosity is understanding's effect. While there can be no question that connectivity, such as that between a mother's body and her fetus, brings into being activity, Spinoza insists also that virtuous activity, as generosity, also produces connectivity, or the coming together of diverse agential forces.

For Descartes, as Chantal Jaquet points out, helping others is a "property" of generosity but not its essence.<sup>25</sup> Cartesian generosity is esteem that follows from the true understanding that nothing truly belongs to me other than my



free control of my volitions. It is a feeling of resolve to use my will well, and only to praise or blame myself or others only on the basis of how we dispose our wills.<sup>26</sup> Freedom, as free will, is at the basis of Cartesian generosity, and sociability is encouraged by generosity, but is not proper to its definition. Thus, the connection between freedom, generosity, and sociability is not as tight as it is in Spinoza. Spinozan generosity is defined equally by freedom and sociability. Since Spinoza plainly rejects freedom as the free control of one's volitions, we are operating with a different understanding of both generosity and freedom.

Freedom for Spinoza is not a faculty proper to our kind, identical in each human being, aligning him or her with God, as it is for Descartes.<sup>27</sup> Whereas for Descartes generosity serves as the basis for something like respect, or proper moral regard of oneself and others, for Spinoza generosity is a hard-won ability to align not with God but with other people in a mutually enabling way. Like Descartes, however, the concept of generosity points toward a commonality. The commonality for Descartes is given by our inviolable freedom of will. In Spinoza it is made possible by the shared laws of our nature, but nevertheless needs to be developed by those who exercise fortitude.

At the risk of excessive repetition, I note again that freedom, or virtue, is the power to act from the necessary laws of one's nature. This idea remains somewhat unclear, and interpreters certainly do not have the same understanding of what these laws must refer to. Generally, for finite modes, the power to exist and act is something that arises between us, by virtue of the necessary laws that govern our shared existence. Some of these laws are entirely general. For example, each body is composed of a particular ratio of motion and rest. And beings on earth are subject to gravity. A singular, finite mode "can neither exist nor act unless it has been determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause, which also has a determinate and finite existence."<sup>28</sup> We only exist and act at all because we are involved with infinitely many other finite beings. And we are more or less active to the extent that we concur with those other finite beings. As the example of an infant reminds us, not just any kind of concurrence will do. There are particular practices, bodies, and things most able to amplify our physical and mental power at a given time. And if our powers combine in mutually enabling ways, he maintains that we "agree in nature." Thus, Spinoza observes:

If [someone] lives among such individuals as agree with his nature, his power of acting will thereby be aided and encouraged. On the other hand, if he is among men who do not at all agree with his nature, he will hardly be able to accommodate himself to them without greatly changing himself.<sup>29</sup> [E4app7]

The concurrence or hostility of ambient modes is to a great extent a matter of fortune, or that which exceeds our power. Since we cannot but imitate the affects of those around us, especially those whose bodies and minds share the most with our own, the extent to which we can preserve and increase our power is strongly affected by the virtue (or lack thereof) of those around us.<sup>30</sup> Even if one necessarily finds oneself in a social milieu that amplifies one's powers more or less, the ability of those among us to move us with joy and wisdom is owed to their virtuous generosity.

Generosity, for Spinoza, is the capacity to transform others through the exercise of one's own joyful wisdom, an ability which follows necessarily from virtue. Spinoza observes that "because, among singular things, we know nothing more excellent than a man who is guided by reason, we can best show how much our skill and understanding are worth [*quantum arte et ingenio valeat*] by educating men so that at last they live according to the command of their own reason." As often happens, Spinoza's remarks immediately acknowledge the contrary as well: people can be awful, can oppose one another bitterly, and are more dangerous than other individuals in nature. Spinoza continues, "Minds, however, are conquered not by arms but by love and generosity."<sup>31</sup> He proceeds to remark on the supreme utility of friendship, but warns that "skill and alertness," *ars et vigilantia*, are necessary for this. The value of reason, then, appears in the generous power of sociability, a practical art of producing and strengthening friendships by bringing others to the threshold of their own reason.

When one acts to enhance the concurrence of powers among neighbors, we ought to understand this to be something that follows from one's nature, even if it ought not be attributed to an individual's exclusive activity. Let us observe with Balibar that when Spinoza elaborates his definition of *conatus* as the "actual essence" of each thing, he says:

From the given essence of each thing some things necessarily follow, and things are able to produce nothing but what follows from their determinate nature. So the power of each thing, or the striving by which it (*either alone or with others*) does anything [...] is nothing but the actual essence of the thing.<sup>32</sup> [E3p6d]

Spinoza defines the essence of an actual thing not only by what it accomplishes independently but also by what it brings about through a concurrence of activity with others. This suggests that "our nature" is not circumscribed by what we customarily think of as our anthropomorphic individuality. Moreover, what can be understood through "the laws of our nature alone" is not only what can be attributed to our exclusive authorship. I do not think that the laws of our nature indicate

some kind of given human nature to will freely or to reason. But they do point to abilities to think and act that are characteristic of those “like us,” and the more we can generate compatibilities, the more we can produce local regularities or laws that predictably produce fortitude. Generosity, I suggest, is that power to generate *convenientia*, such that the scope of what follows from our nature is enlarged. Freedom as necessary activity—rather than as given faculty—involves the alignment and coordination of diverse powers. Generosity is one such description of the skill by which commonality and *convenientia* are brought into being.

## II. Militant Generosity

Today we associate generosity with benevolence, altruism, and supererogatory acts. Several of the affects that Spinoza associates with *fortitudo* similarly suggest renunciation and self-limitation more than vitality and power. The sub-species of courage and generosity—sobriety, moderation, modesty, and chastity—are not what we typically associate with self-actualization.<sup>33</sup> Despite the Christian resonance of pointing to modesty and chastity as expressions of the soul’s power, Spinoza’s ethics do not paint a portrait of freedom as a spiritual fortress, a power to disengage from the trivialities of earthly life, or a determination to retreat into the self. On my interpretation, Spinoza does not advocate the maxim of Descartes’s provisional morality, recommending that, in the absence of certainty about what to do, we work more on ourselves than on fortune.<sup>34</sup> Or perhaps better, Spinoza recommends that we work on the forces of fortune such that they may become our own. I suggest that Spinoza’s account of generosity and the affects that flow from it, *modestia* and *clementia*, imply Spinoza’s activist posture toward fortune. We will see again that freedom as a social power calls further into question the boundaries between the powers we attribute to others and those we might rightfully call our own.

Spinoza defines *modestia* as “a desire to do what pleases men and not what displeases them” [*cupiditas ea faciendi quae hominibus placent et omittendi quae displicent*].<sup>35</sup> Modesty is a species of ambition, which is defined in the same way, but is not typically guided by reason.<sup>36</sup> Ambition often prompts us to please others through impressing them, distinguishing ourselves, and endeavoring to display our superiority. Yet the desire to be a source of joy to others expresses strength when guided by reason, because it involves the “skill and temperament” that produce an enduring augmentation in their power to think and act. Rather than briefly producing joy through a spectacular act, as standard ambition might involve,

*modestia* produces joy in others through offering a more enduring and complete pleasure, like, for example, the ability to identify plants, interpret a text, or regard oneself as an instance of perfection. *Modestia*, although not precisely what we tend to mean in English by “modesty,” is distinguished from ambition because it does not involve displaying our heroic distinction.<sup>37</sup> Instead, *modestia* follows from enjoying together those goods that are more enjoyable the more they are shared.<sup>38</sup>

But because, as Spinoza frequently laments, social life often involves being harmed by others, remaining determined by active affects rather than sad passions also requires *clementia*. We need that strength of character that enables us “to bear men’s wrongs calmly, and apply [our] zeal to those things which help to bring men together in friendship.”<sup>39</sup> If we remind ourselves frequently that “men, like other things, act from the necessity of nature, then the wrong, or the hate usually arising from it will occupy a very small part of the imagination and easily be overcome.”<sup>40</sup> Whereas Descartes contends that generosity disposes one to interpret another’s acts as following from her free will, Spinoza declares that imagining one another to be determined by necessity is what promises to deliver us from hatred, envy, mockery, and other sad passions.<sup>41</sup> *Clementia* is a power of mind because it is grounded in understanding men, including oneself, “as they are and not as we would like them to be.”<sup>42</sup> Through appreciating the rich network of causes within which humans operate, we are freed from the misery of a life fueled by hatred and vengeance.<sup>43</sup> Forgiveness, or clemency, then, expresses a strength of soul rather than a repudiation of an individual’s desire. It involves strength of mind directly because our tranquility enables us to understand ourselves and others more adequately. And insofar as it enables us to focus on the means to engender friendship rather than the means to satisfy our longing for vengeance, it contributes to the genuine fund of our power to think and act: sociality.

Spinoza consistently contrasts the desire for retribution, revenge, and war with generosity.<sup>44</sup> Generosity is an alternative, non-belligerent mode by which we can overcome hostile forces. Nonetheless, when Spinoza declares that the other’s hate should not be repaid in kind, but should be “conquered” by love and generosity, he uses martial language. Generosity involves actively disrupting and overpowering the violence of social antagonism. In Spinoza’s words,

One who is eager to overcome hate by love, strives joyously and confidently, resists many men as easily as one, and requires the least help of fortune. Those whom he conquers will yield joyously, not from lack of strength, but from an increase in their powers. [E4p46s]

Generosity, most essentially, is that power to turn haters into lovers, transmuting hostile forces into one’s own arms. More evocative of Machiavelli’s *Prince* than of

Jesus Christ,<sup>45</sup> Spinozan generosity is not a spiritual largesse that humbly defers judgment to God. Rather, generosity actively works on and against the forces of hatred to produce new alignments of shared power, pleasure, and knowledge.

Generosity conveys strength rather than weakness, power rather than need, if we reflect on Spinoza's remarks that, in a hostile environment, it is very difficult to withstand the desire to react with hatred or cruelty.<sup>46</sup> Joining others to oneself is not only a matter of having more hands to accomplish what yours alone cannot. It is primarily a matter of responding to adversity with love rather than weakness. To join others to ourselves, especially those others who provoke intense sad passions in us, requires a powerful soul and body, a mode of being that is not easily perturbed, upset, or disintegrated by trauma. Instead, the generous emit joy and desire so powerfully that, instead of imitating the hatred of others, those same others imitate the generous, *yielding joyously*. Because their hostility yields to admiration, those who might have been enemies become friends.<sup>47</sup> Generosity forges relations of agreement [*convenientia*] where they did not previously exist. The strong of soul exercise generosity when, rather than being changed by adversity, they overwhelm it with their own joyful radiations. In overcoming the hostile affects of others, modest generosity upsets the push-pull of struggles for domination with a common striving for shared power and joy. It is only great virtue and power that can re-order not only one's perspective on fortune but fortune itself.

## Notes

- 1 Daniel Garber, "Dr. Fischelson's dilemma: Spinoza on freedom and sociability," in *Spinoza on Reason and the "Free Man,"* ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal (New York: Little Room Press, 1994).
- 2 TP, ch. ii, §15.
- 3 TP, ch. vi, §1.
- 4 E4p35s.
- 5 TTP, ch. v, §7.
- 6 E4p37.
- 7 For example, E4p18, E4p35, E4p37.
- 8 Garber, "Dr. Fischelson's dilemma," 191.
- 9 E4p46 and E5p10s.
- 10 E4d8.
- 11 E2p47.
- 12 E4d1.
- 13 Garber, "Dr. Fischelson's dilemma," 204. I agree with Matthew Homan's interpretation (on this point) in "Rehumanizing Spinoza's Free Man," in *Doing*

without Free Will: *Spinoza and Contemporary Moral Problems*, ed. Ursula Goldenbaum and Christopher Kluz (Lexington, KY: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015).

- 14 Garber, "Dr. Fischelson's dilemma," 195.
- 15 E5p39s.
- 16 E4p4.
- 17 There is a lively debate about whether Spinoza means to say that a man strives to enhance his singular nature, or whether man strives to enhance "human nature" as such. Without being able to justify this here, I interpret Spinoza to maintain that each human mode has a singular striving, or essence, and that there is no common essence we could call "human" that is given by nature. Insofar as we have shared properties, they are common notions and therefore not essences (by E2p37).
- 18 E3p59.
- 19 E3da2.
- 20 E3p59s.
- 21 E3p9d.
- 22 E3p59s.
- 23 E4p38.
- 24 E2p14.
- 25 Chantal Jaquet, "La fortitude cachée et les affects actifs de fermeté et générosité," in *Fortitude et Servitude : Lectures de l'Éthique IV de Spinoza*, ed. Chantal Jaquet, Pacal Sévérac, and Ariel Suhamy (Paris : Éditions Kimé, 2003).
- 26 Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, art. 153 [AT XI 445–446/CSM II 384].
- 27 Descartes, *Passions of the Soul*, art. 152 [AT XI 445/CSM II 384].
- 28 E1p28.
- 29 For an interesting and subtle analysis that differs from mine, see Jean-Marie Beyssade, "Vix (Éthique IV Appendice chapitre 7) ou peut-on se sauver tout seul?," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 99, no. 4 (1994): 493–503.
- 30 E3p27. Freedom is a matter of the degree of activity we enjoy, but our activity must not be understood only as our ability to affect others while shielding ourselves from affection. It is also as our ability to concur with others. Sometimes we concur or come together with others by chance. Thus, Spinoza remarks in a letter that "of the things outside my power, I esteem none more than being allowed the honour of entering a pact of friendship with people who sincerely love the truth" [Ep. 19]. Friendship here is described as a matter of fortune, as something deeply beneficial that exceeds Spinoza's control. But the definition of generosity, as the rational desire to join others to oneself in friendship, suggests that sociability animated by a shared love of wisdom can be owed to the generosity of our wise friends. Perhaps what he esteems here is the power to form community or agreement [*convenientia*] that he has on occasion been fortunate to encounter in others.
- 31 E4app11.

- 32 Emphasis added by Étienne Balibar in *Spinoza: From Individuality to Transindividuality* (Delft: Elburon, 1997), 21.
- 33 The idea of freedom as renunciation is not especially paradoxical on a dualist model, such as Descartes's, according to which virtue follows from disciplining the body according to the requirements of reason. See Pierre Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza, tome 5: Les voies de la libération* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), 36–37: "If freedom were purely a question of will, it would, with the same gesture, be enclosed within the paradox of a liberty that would be a manipulation, therefore an enslavement, or a subordination to an external order; instead of being the natural actualization of a power that liberates in liberating all that lies within it to do, insofar as it is a cause determined to produce effects that would naturally be its proper effects" (our translation).
- 34 See Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Part Three [CSM II 122–126/AT VI 23–31].
- 35 E3da43.
- 36 E3da44.
- 37 E3p59s. In a provocative article Julie Cooper cites this as evidence that Spinoza advocates power through anonymity. See Julie Cooper, "Freedom of Speech and Philosophical Citizenship in Spinoza's *Theological-Political Treatise*," *Law, Culture, and the Humanities* 2, no. 1 (2006): 91–114.
- 38 Spinoza cites knowledge of God or Nature as that good that is increased rather than diminished by the enjoyment of all [E4p36]. He also points to theater, pleasant smells, and diverse foods as part of the life of the wise [E4p45s].
- 39 E4app14.
- 40 E5p10s.
- 41 For example, E2p49s and E4p37s1.
- 42 TP, ch. i, §1.
- 43 E4p46s.
- 44 For example, "Minds, however, are conquered not by arms, but by love and generosity" [E4app11].
- 45 Macherey also contrasts this to the command to "turn the other cheek," in Pierre Macherey, *Introduction à l'Éthique de Spinoza, tome 4: La condition humaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998), 273. Matthew Kisner, however, interprets E4p46 in line with Christian morality, in Matthew Kisner, *Spinoza on Human Freedom: Reason, Autonomy, and the Good Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 205. If we think of the confrontational Christianity of Martin Luther King, Jr., who combines loving and martial language, Spinoza's words here are perhaps not so distant. See King's speech, "The sword that heals."
- 46 E4app7.
- 47 E4p35s.

# A Response: A Generous Reading

Ariel Suhamy

I must make a confession. After reading her piece, I first wondered why Hasana Sharp worked to respond so precisely and cleverly to Daniel Garber's reading, which, for my part, I would have rejected off-hand as sophistic. First, I took it for granted that Spinoza does not identify adequate causality with causal independence or self-sufficiency—only substance enjoys this identification. Second, if we can effectively attribute the universal cause of society (or, to be precise, of the return to society, see TP, ch. vi, §1) to the provision of basic needs and the fear of loneliness, this does not imply that all sociability is reduced to the fulfillment of needs and the conquering of fear. Spinoza, in fact, provides two other motivations: on the one hand, the affects of the multitude (three of them are cited: fear, revenge for an evil suffered in common, and hope); on the other hand, reason itself, which disposes the free man to follow collective commands rather than elect for a state of loneliness wherein he only obeys himself. Of course, for Spinoza, this last motive is not universal (no more than are the affects of the multitude, in fact)—in other words, society itself cannot be entirely explained by it. It is only valid for the rare few led by reason. But this does not prevent it from playing a vital role in a given society, as illustrated, for example, in chapter 20 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*. And if the *Political Treatise*, like the *Theological-Political Treatise*, claims that freedom is the aim of political life, this does not mean that political life terminates with freedom, which would be like its horizon and limit point (although I think that one can do justice to this Marxist interpretation). Rather, the point is that freedom can be pursued only from *within* society, even if society is invariably penetrated, to a greater or lesser degree, by passions or irrationality [E4p71]—and it is precisely



such passages from lesser to greater that are indexed to generosity by Spinoza. Perhaps, moreover, one could say that generosity facilitates the passage from fear or revenge to hope as the affective glue of political life, but this would, I think, take me too far afield.

Maybe my initial reaction is typical of the difference between what may be called the French school and the American school. Faced with such Garber's provocative reading, I might find myself hiding behind the logic of the system, establishing myself as its guardian—at the risk, even, of adopting the unpleasant role of the censor. Such an attitude would not be very generous in the Spinozist sense of the term (perhaps it would be in the Cartesian sense?), even if it respects the letter of the text, in virtue of the fact that it would divide us rather than uniting us. To borrow a military metaphor used by Sharp, the adversary might be defeated, but not by an excess of strength, and therefore not in a manner that is eligible to instill good will: while grumbling, he might reluctantly acknowledge his mistake, but not without rancor, and he would likely still continue to think that Spinoza is contradicting himself.

Following this logic, Sharp does not directly oppose Garber's argument, but rather proceeds to develop and deepen the idea of a reasonable sociability, and of what reason can bring to society through analysis of the affect (because it is above all an affect) of generosity. It is an argument that is not purely theoretical, that does not merely indulge in the play of concepts, which one can make say many things (so long as practical and ethical implications are ignored); rather it places itself on the terrain of the practical and ethical—a terrain that is the basis of Spinoza's work. In other words, this approach is itself generous: it is less concerned with righting wrongs by pointing out inadequacies of reasoning or of references, as it with elucidating an image of generosity that responds to Garber more effectively than any myopic or capricious disciplinary discussion could. And, ultimately, this seems to me more genuinely Spinozist, and decidedly less pedantic, than the approach I would've initially adopted.

Sharp's approach is a study in contrasts. The contrast between Spinozist generosity and the Cartesian generosity of the *Passions of the Soul* is particularly illuminating here. For with this confrontation, the figure of Sharp/Garber comes to mirror that of Spinoza/Descartes, which, in turn, evokes by virtue of its subject (the birth of friendship) the confrontation between Epicureans and Stoics in the ninth letter of Seneca concerning the problems of necessity, need, and giving. What strikes me here is the question of equality. Cartesian generosity appears as a principle of fundamental equality: we recognize and admire this free faculty with which every man is endowed, whether or not they make use of it. All

men are born free, and therefore, they are equal in that they are entitled to the recognition of the same level of dignity. One could say that Cartesian generosity is a bit like “common sense,” which is seemingly the most widely shared thing in the world, because everyone thinks they are sufficiently well-equipped with it so as to be happy with themselves. As is well known, although this appears ironic, it also describes something genuine; besides, the principle of individual preference for one’s own opinions plays an important role in social contract philosophies such as that of Hobbes, of which Descartes, for instance, approved with regard to political theory. Is Spinozism a philosophy of the individual or of the community? Whatever one’s view, it is hard to deny that the thoughts of Descartes and Hobbes certainly fall more on the side of individuality. Cartesian generosity is founded on the consciousness of a faculty that we possess from the outset, and that distinguishes us from all other living beings. It suggests that every person is an equal, conscious of their dignity; but it concerns others only secondarily.

Faced with this schema, Sharp shows that the Spinozist conception of generosity blurs the hitherto mentioned categories to completely reverse the situation. First, generosity appears—contrary to the Cartesian approach—as grounded in a principle of inequality, of asymmetry. Spinoza’s “generous man” makes an effort to win others over to their position, to transform them. Spinoza says of generosity what Descartes says of love, namely that it is an essentially communicative affect. To the Cartesian value of individuals, bestowed equally upon all—free will, which makes us God’s equals—is substituted *ars et ingenium*, which are unequally distributed. What for Hobbes is a principle of war, in Spinoza is still a principle of war, but here war can give way to a victory for all. And this seems to me to be especially noteworthy, because we tend to think of Spinoza as favoring equality, and of arguing that democracy is the best regime because it is the closest to the equality that men enjoy in a state of nature. Nevertheless, Spinoza observes at E4p70s that only “passionate men” demand equality in exchange for what they give, what Spinoza sees as mere commerce or exchange, a sort of quid pro quo relationship. There is, in fact, equality in the ground and in the object of generosity (“the common good which everyone can equally enjoy,” as per E4p36), but not in the action of the generous man himself, who makes an effort to convert another to something which is not inwardly given—and is not a right, nor a duty: that is, the development of reason and freedom. The freedom that Spinoza claims is the freedom to think and *teach*: to convert others to the thought of the common good, thereby abandoning the idea of a pure liberalism wherein all ideas could coexist due to the appeasement

of conflicts engendered by the protection of some Leviathan. On the contrary, Spinozist society demands violent debates. Such debates can be beheld in his correspondence. Spinoza rehashes the martial metaphor of combat, and he certainly does not favor a pacifist irenicism of the type that Descartes channeled in the rules he proposed for the Swedish Academy.

Sharp thus puts forth a very suggestive idea, one that will likely be doubly provocative for readers of Deleuze, as he borrowed similar notions from Alquié: that one does not become active due to “good encounters” or in virtue of the art of organizing “good encounters” (e.g., with like-minded fellows, or at least with those with whom we have something in common, such as other Spinozists, etc.), an art we master in an effort to augment our strength or constitute stronger totalities. Rather, one becomes active by cultivating “the capacity to think and to act according to one’s own abilities” to the point of modifying the very concept of *fortuna* and the encounter. In contradistinction with the Cartesian injunction, itself inspired by Stoicism, that commands the modification of our desires rather than the re-ordering of the world, Spinoza favors a novel approach. For Spinoza, everything is ultimately about *interpreting* events and encounters. It is not a matter of finding a niche, an underground community, which represents an escape from the common social order, but, rather, of using and making *fortuna* ours—and thus, in the end, changing the order of the world through the sole power of rational desire. An encounter not only increases the power to act, it also increases the capacity to be affected. Power is not defined by self-sufficiency, but by openness to all that can affect it and can nourish reason.

I would now like to conclude with several questions. First of all, Spinozist generosity certainly relies on the idea of necessity, in opposition to Descartes: the necessity of desire itself, the necessity according to which the free man must take advantage of society, and, finally, the necessity of passions that will console inevitable failures. What Spinoza’s generous man “acknowledges” in another person is also the possibility to amend that person, independently of any absolute will, since such a possibility will depend on many kinds of supplementary circumstances. From this, we see, derives the notion of possibility, due to our ignorance of necessary order of things. To this extent, is there not something in common with Descartes, which explains why Spinoza takes up his term? Despite their differences, both recognize a principle of uncertainty, whether in the use made of free will or in reaction to the advances of generosity. Must we not think, faced with necessity, a principle of contingency relative to our ignorance, and that generosity must also take into account? Is it not this that remains of free will, or, in other words, of the principle of Cartesian uncertainty? Certainly, whereas

Descartes speaks of a human faculty which is not bound by necessity, Spinoza speaks only of our ignorance of necessity. Nevertheless, it would probably be good to ask why Spinoza takes up the term “generosity,” and inquire after what he does hold in common with Descartes.

Moreover, the diversity of causes in the political order favors something like a plurality of hypotheses: every act can be explained in many ways [E4p59s]. Is not this also where generosity stakes its claim, in the generous interpretation of the acts of others, in the effort to pretend that reason was already in control? Recall the importance of “as if” in the *Political Treatise*: the good institution behaves or functions “as if” men were already rational to prepare them for the possible advent of reason. But this brings up a final issue. Generosity, for Spinoza, is defined by the effort to establish bonds of friendship. But is friendship immediately political? Indeed, what is the relationship between the formation of groups of friends and political life?



## Part IV

# Political Philosophy



## Anthropomorphism, Teleology, and Superstition: The Politics of Obedience in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*

Daniel Garber

One of the central targets of Spinoza's *Ethics* is anthropomorphism, the idea that God is like us, that God has a will like ours, chooses to do this or that, and acts for the sake of reasons. Because of this, Spinoza wants to deny that there are final causes in the world: everything follows not from the divine will, but from the divine nature, not by divine choice, but by necessity. The anthropomorphic and teleological view of God and the nature that Spinoza wants to deny is, for him, one of the central supports of superstition: we believe that things are ordered for us by an anthropomorphic God, and that by praying to him we can ensure our success in the world. But even though the argument of the *Ethics* is directed squarely against this conception of God and the world, I want to maintain that the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* is strangely different. In the end, I argue, Spinoza does not eliminate the anthropomorphic view of God completely, but, in a way, transforms it into something positive, something that will lead people to virtue and support the stability of society.

In E1app, Spinoza begins by reviewing what he takes himself to have proved in the body of *Ethics* Part 1, that God exists, that he is unique, etc. But then he turns to the main business of the Appendix, addressing directly the “prejudices that could prevent my demonstrations from being perceived.”<sup>1</sup> This resembles the strategy of some of his philosophical contemporaries. Bacon begins his *Instauratio magna* project with an account of the Idols, inborn tendencies of thought that tend to lead us astray, which must be corrected before we can find the truth. Descartes begins the *Meditations* by doubting everything he formerly believed, in order to withdraw the mind from the senses and, more generally, to



clear the mind of the Aristotelian assumptions that we naturally come upon in the careless years of our youth, and which are reinforced by our parents and our teachers. Spinoza, too, thinks that we are all naturally led into errors that cloud the mind and must be eliminated before we can perceive the truth. But he offers a rather different suggestion about where we go wrong:

All the prejudices I here undertake to expose depend on this one: that men commonly suppose that all natural things act, as men do, on account of an end; indeed, they maintain as certain that God himself directs all things to some certain end, for they say that God has made all things for man, and man that he might worship God. [E1app/G II 77]

In short, the central prejudice that Spinoza recognizes is the teleological conception of nature, the idea that everything has a purpose, given to it by God. Spinoza then goes on to offer a diagnosis of how this prejudice arises, to give a series of arguments intended to attack it directly, and to give an account of the other errors that this prejudice leads us to make.

Important from the perspective of my interests is the account that Spinoza gives of why people all have a tendency to hold a teleological view of nature. People begin, Spinoza says, with a mistaken belief that they have a free will. And since they always act for an end, that is, they do that which leads to their own advantage, they assume that other people do as well. When they cannot learn directly from other people what those ends are in some particular case, they infer what those ends must be by imagining themselves in their circumstances, and reflecting on what might have motivated them to do what they do. In this way people “necessarily judge the temperament of other men from their own temperament” [G II 78]. Looking outside the world of human actions, people notice things that are useful for them: “e.g., eyes for seeing, teeth for chewing, plants and animals for food, the sun for light, the sea for supporting fish.” And so people behave much as they do when confronted with another person whose behavior they seek to understand: they imagine themselves in the position of the divinities, and reflect on what might have motivated them to do something similar. In particular, they infer that these features of the world are there for a purpose as well, put there by a God or gods for their benefit: “They had to infer that there was a ruler, or a number of rulers of nature, endowed with human freedom, who had taken care of all things for them, and made all things for their use.” Naturally, they assume that these Gods do things for the same kinds of reasons that humans act. “Hence, they maintained that the Gods direct all things for the use of men in order to bind men to them and be held by men in the highest honor.” And this, in turn, led people to

worship this God, “so that God might love them above all the rest, and direct the whole of Nature according to the needs of their blind desire and insatiable greed.”

The underlying sin that leads to the positing of final causes is anthropomorphism: the idea that God is in important respects like us, that God has a will, and chooses to act one way or another for reasons. Spinoza notes:

To say something here also about the intellect and will which we commonly attribute to God—if will and intellect do pertain to the eternal essence of God, we must of course understand by each of these attributes something different from what men commonly understand. For the intellect and will which would constitute God’s essence would have to differ entirely from our intellect and will, and could not agree with them in anything except the name. They would not agree with one another any more than do the dog that is a heavenly constellation and the dog that is a barking animal. [E1p17s/G II 62–63]

Spinoza’s God is eternal, that is to say, exists completely outside of time and does not act in time. While God is the efficient cause of everything [E1p25], what exists is not a matter of his choice and decision, but what follows from the necessity of his nature [E1p16].

Closely connected with anthropomorphism and final causes is Spinoza’s conception of superstition. In E1app, the end of his account of how people come to treat God anthropomorphically, Spinoza notes: “This prejudice was changed into superstition, and struck deep roots in their minds” [G II 79].

The idea of superstition in the seventeenth century was somewhat vague. The *Académie Française* dictionary of 1694 defines it as follows:

Opinion vaine, mal fondée en fait de religion. Fausse confiance en de certaines paroles, en de certaines cérémonies, ausquelles s’attachent les personnes foibles & simples.

Superstition seems to be just a general irrationality, especially about matters religious, an irrationality associated with the common people. This is quite consonant with the way Spinoza often uses the term. In chapter 7 of the *Theological-Political Treatise* he writes that superstition is an evil “which teaches men to scorn reason and nature, and to admire and venerate only what is contrary to both of these” [TTP, ch. vii, §4/G III 97]. In a letter he wrote to Oldenburg in November or December 1675, he notes that “the chief distinction I make between religion and superstition is that the latter is founded on ignorance, the former on wisdom” [Ep. 73/G IV 307–308].

But Spinoza also seems to have a more precise idea about what superstition is supposed to be. In this more precise sense of the term, superstition seems

connected especially with fear and uncertainty. In a letter to Albert Burgh from December 1675 he writes: “You have become the slave of this Church [i.e. the Roman Catholic Church] not so much through love of God as fear of Hell, which is the single cause of superstition” [Ep. 76/G IV 323]. In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza seems to link fear and superstition in a more general way. In the very first sentence of the Preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza comments on how we come to be bound by superstition: “If men could manage all their affairs by a definite plan, or if fortune were always favorable to them, they would never be possessed by superstition” [G III 5]. Later in the Preface he writes:

We could give a great many examples which would show most clearly that men struggle with superstition only so long as they are in fear; that all the things they have ever worshipped in illusory religion have been nothing but apparitions, the delusions of a sad and timid mind; and finally that seers have held the greatest control over the common people, and been most dangerous to their Kings, when states have been in the greatest difficulties. [TTP, pref., §6/G III 6]

How exactly is this supposed to work? The kind of fear that Spinoza has in mind, I think, arises from the lack of control we have over things in the world. Here, again, is the opening passage of the Preface:

If men could manage all their affairs by a definite plan, or if fortune were always favorable to them, they would never be possessed by superstition. But often they are in such straits that they cannot decide on any plan. For the most part they vacillate wretchedly between hope and fear, because of the uncertain goods of fortune, which they desire immoderately. [TTP, pref., §1/G III 5]

In particular, the fear that moves them to superstition seems to be the fear that we may lose things that are important to us. Again, in the Preface he writes:

We see that the men most thoroughly enslaved to every kind of superstition are the ones who immoderately desire uncertain goods, and that they all invoke divine aid with prayers and unmanly tears, especially when they are in danger and cannot help themselves. Because reason cannot show a certain way to the hollow things they desire, they call it blind, and human wisdom vain. The delusions of the imagination, on the other hand, and dreams and childish follies they believe to be divine answers. [TTP, pref., §4/G III 5]

The superstition to which this fear leads us is the positing of a God who imposes a kind of order in the world, an order that isn't really there. We want to know what will give us some certainty, will help us become rich or successful, and will help us to get the material things in the world. We therefore suppose order

and patterns in nature, hidden messages from God where there are none. When fearful people become frustrated with reason, which “cannot show a certain way to the hollow things they desire,” “they believe God rejects the wise, and writes his decrees, not in the mind, but in the entrails of animals, and that fools, madmen and birds predict his decrees by divine inspiration and prompting” [TTP, pref., §4/G III 5]. And they then pray to this God to help them overcome their fear by ensuring that they can get what they want. This, then, is superstition: the belief that there is a hidden order imposed by God (or the gods), and that if we pray in the appropriate way, we will gain the control over our lives that we seek, currently without success. In this way, superstition is closely intertwined with the anthropomorphic conception of God and the teleological conception of the world. While someone could, in principle, adopt an anthropomorphic and teleological conception of God and nature without being superstitious, superstition requires an anthropomorphic God (or gods) who acts for a purpose. While in a way distinct from superstition, anthropomorphism and teleology leave the imperfectly rational person open to superstition. Assuming a teleological nature and an anthropomorphic God or gods, the superstitious, greedy for goods or fearful of losing what they have, attempt to exploit these beliefs for their own personal benefit.

Considered together, anthropomorphism, teleology, and superstition constitute a nexus of problematic perspectives that, it would seem, can only lead us astray both in what we believe and in how we act in the world.

At this point, I would like to turn back to some other themes in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, themes that may seem at first entirely unrelated to the question of anthropomorphism, final causes, and superstition: obedience to moral law and what Spinoza calls the “dogmas of universal faith.”<sup>2</sup>

In the *Theological-Political Treatise* Spinoza writes: “For from Scripture itself we have perceived its general tendency without any difficulty or ambiguity: to love God above all else, and to love your neighbor as yourself” [TTP, ch. xii, §34/G III 165; cf. TTP, ch. xiv, §9/G III 174]. More generally Spinoza argues that the central teaching of revelation is not knowledge, strictly speaking, not a particular proposition that should be believed as true, but a *command*. As a consequence, Scripture should be seen as requiring *obedience to this command*. In the title to chapter 13, for example, Spinoza notes that the Scripture “does not aim at anything but obedience” [G III 167]. Later in the chapter, Spinoza notes that “the purpose of Scripture was not to teach the sciences. For from this we can easily judge that it requires nothing from men but obedience, and condemns only stubbornness, not ignorance” [TTP, ch. xiii, §7/G III 168].

The love of God and of one's neighbor is, for Spinoza, central to the practice of religion. Not surprisingly, this is what reason teaches as well, as Spinoza argues in the *Ethics*. In E4p37 Spinoza proves that "the good which everyone who seeks virtue wants for himself, he also desires for other men; and this Desire is greater as his knowledge of God is greater." The greatest good is, of course, to live according to the guidance of reason, that's to say, to know God [E4p27-E4p28], and insofar as other people share this nature with us, they will be useful to us, that is, capable of entering into a stable society with us [E4p29-37]. That is to say, the rational person loves his neighbor as himself, because in doing so, he makes his neighbor a suitable member of a common society. And the idea that insofar as we are rational we love God above all is a central conclusion of *Ethics* Part 5, the ground of eternity and beatitude. It is not surprising that these same conclusions, conceived now as commands to be obeyed rather than the consequences of rational deliberation appear as the teachings of revelation. As Spinoza argues in opening chapters of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, there is nothing that we can learn from revelation that couldn't be learned from reason, except obedience itself.<sup>3</sup>

But imperfectly rational people can't learn to love their neighbors and God as eternal truths which can be established through reason in the *Ethics*. They need to be convinced to regard them as commands, and they need to be convinced to obey them. This, for Spinoza, is where faith enters. He notes:

Everyone is agreed that Scripture was written and published, not for the wise only, but for all people, of every age and kind. From these considerations alone it follows with the greatest evidence that the only thing we are bound by Scriptural command to believe is what is absolutely necessary to carry out this command. So this command itself is the unique standard of the whole universal faith. Only through it are we to determine all the dogmas of that faith, those everyone is bound to accept. [TTP, ch. xiv, §10/G III 174]

This leads directly to Spinoza's definition of faith:

I shall begin with a definition of faith, which, according to the foundation we have given, must be defined as follows: thinking such things about God that if the person disregards them, obedience to God is destroyed, and such that, if obedience to God is posited, they are necessarily posited. [TTP, ch. xiv, §13/G III 175]

Faith involves thinking things, that is, holding beliefs that certain propositions are true. These propositions are beliefs such that *if* you are obedient to the central command of revealed religion, then you necessarily hold them.<sup>4</sup>

Spinoza has some very specific ideas about what specific propositions are involved in the kind of faith he has in mind. In chapter 12 of the *Theological-Political Treatise* he writes:

Since, then, we must maintain that this foundation is uncorrupted [i.e., the command “to love God above all else, and to love your neighbor as yourself”], we must also grant the same about those other [teachings] which uncontroversially follow from it, and are equally fundamental: that God exists; that he provides for all; that he is omnipotent; that in accordance with his decree, things go well with the pious, but badly with the wicked; and that our salvation depends only on his grace. [TTP, ch. xii, §36/G III 165]

Spinoza returns to the question in Chapter 14, where he sets out what he calls the “dogmas of universal faith [*fidei universalis dogmata*] in more detail.”<sup>5</sup> He begins as follows:

And I shall not be afraid now to enumerate the dogmas of universal faith, that is, the fundamental principles of the whole of Scripture, all of which ... must tend to this point: that there is a supreme being, who loves Justice and Loving-kindness; that everyone, if he is to be saved, is bound to obey this being and to worship him by practicing Justice and Loving-kindness toward his neighbor. [TTP, ch. xiv, §24/G III 177]

These, then, are the dogmas he proposes:

- I. that God exists, i.e., that there is a supreme being, supremely just and merciful, that is, a model [*exemplar*] of true life; for whoever does not know or does not believe that he exists cannot obey him or know him as a Judge;
- II. that he is unique; for no one can doubt that this too is absolutely required for supreme devotion, admiration and love towards God; devotion, admiration and love arise only from the excellence of one by comparison with the others;
- III. that he is present everywhere, or that everything is open to him; for if things were believed to be hidden from him, or people were not aware that he sees all, they would have doubts about the equity of his Justice, by which he directs all things, or at least they would not be aware of it;
- IV. that he has the supreme right and dominion over all things, and does nothing because he is compelled by a law, but acts only from his absolute good pleasure and special grace; for everyone is bound absolutely to obey him, but he is not bound to obey anyone;

- V. that the worship of God and obedience to him consist only in Justice and Loving-kindness, that is, in the love of one's neighbor;
- VI. that all and only those who obey God by living in this way are saved, the rest, who live under the control of the pleasures, being lost; if men did not firmly believe this, there would be no reason why they should prefer to obey God rather than their pleasures;
- VII. finally, that God pardons the sins of those who repent. [TTP, ch. xiv, §§25–28/G III 177–178]

Spinoza claims that anyone who is obedient to the command is obligated to believe these: they are taken to be necessary conditions of obedience.<sup>6</sup>

To understand Spinoza's claim here, we need to understand what he means by obedience in this context. Spinoza's conception of obedience is greatly clarified in one of the later notes he added to the text from chapter 16 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*. The text to which the note is attached reads as follows:

No one knows, by nature, that he is bound by any obedience to God; indeed, no one can attain this knowledge by reason at all, but only by revelation, confirmed by signs. [TTP, ch. xvi, §53/G III 198]

In his note on this passage, Spinoza makes the following remarks:

The love of God is not obedience, but a virtue which is necessarily in the man who rightly knows God. Obedience is concerned with the will of the one commanding, not with the necessity and truth of the matter. [...] [W]e have shown that the divine laws seem to us to be laws, that is, things instituted just as long as we do not know their cause. But when this is known, they thereby cease to be laws, and we embrace them not as laws, but as eternal truths. That is, obedience passes into love, which proceeds from true knowledge as necessarily as light does from the sun. So we can, indeed, love God according to the guidance of reason, but we cannot obey him according to the guidance of reason, since by reason we can neither embrace divine laws as divine so long as we are ignorant of their cause, nor conceive God as establishing those laws like a prince. [TTP, ch. xvi, adn. xxxiv/G III 264]<sup>7</sup>

Spinoza explains it in similar terms in a letter to Willem van Blyenbergh on January 5, 1665:

To answer the first, I say that scripture, since it is intended mainly to serve ordinary people, continually speaks in a human fashion. For the people are not capable of understanding high matters. Therefore, I believe that all the things which God has revealed to the prophets to be necessary for salvation are written in the manner of laws. And in this way the prophets wrote a whole parable.

First, because God had revealed the means to salvation and destruction, and was the cause of them, they represented him as a king and lawgiver. The means, which are nothing but causes, they called laws and wrote in the manner of laws. Salvation and destruction, which are nothing but effects which follow from the means, they represented as reward and punishment. They have ordered all their words more according to this parable than according to the truth. Throughout they have represented God as a man, now angry, now merciful, now longing for the future, now seized by jealousy and suspicion, indeed even deceived by the devil. So the Philosophers, and with them all those who are above the law, i.e., who follow virtue not as a law, but from love, because it is the best thing, should not be shocked by such words. [Ep. 19/G IV 92–93]<sup>8</sup>

In these passages, Spinoza draws a contrast between the rational person, capable of understanding eternal truths, and the imperfectly rational person, who isn't. For the perfectly rational person, the person who has "true knowledge," loving God is something he does out of necessity, "as necessarily as light [passes from] the sun." However, not everyone is in this position. Those who aren't must conceive of loving God as if it were the command of a prince. In this way, while the perfectly rational person will love God, he will not do so out of *obedience*, strictly speaking: knowing that God is not the kind of being that gives commands, to the extent that we are rational, we simply *can't* obey God. Obedience to the moral law is, in this way, appropriate only for those who follow the moral law because they believe that they are commanded to do so by someone who, like a prince or a king, has the authority to command, and not because they understand through reason why they should. While rational person embraces the moral laws "not as laws, but as eternal truths,"<sup>9</sup> the imperfectly rational person must embrace moral laws, as laws decreed by a lawgiver.

With this we can see how the dogmas of universal faith are connected with obedience. The person with limited intellect doesn't see how the imperative to love God and his neighbor are eternal truths, which once understood must be followed. Instead, he sees them as laws, commands, like the laws that a prince decrees for his subjects. If he genuinely believes that there is a God who is a supreme being, merciful, just, and worthy of love, and at the same time is a lawgiver and a judge, omnipresent, omnipotent, and whose will we are bound to obey, then he would at least be inclined to be obedient to this God. If, on the other hand, such a person were to be obedient and determined to follow the command to love God and his neighbor, then it is not unreasonable for him to believe that there is a God who had exactly the properties that are ascribed to him in Spinoza's dogmas of universal faith, that he is supreme, merciful, just,



a lawgiver and a judge, omnipresent, omnipotent, etc. Furthermore, Spinoza wants to argue that this moral lawgiver has a character that constitutes a model for us to follow: "There is a supreme being, supremely just and merciful, that is, a model [*exemplar*] of true life."<sup>10</sup> One would have to do considerably more work to demonstrate that the precise doctrines Spinoza advances rigorously follow from obedience. But the general idea should be clear enough: obedience to the moral law is closely connected with a belief in the existence of a moral lawgiver, a model of rectitude who demands our obedience.

It is important here that it doesn't matter whether these dogmas of universal faith are true or false, strictly speaking. What is important is that people must believe in them in order to be obedient to the moral law:

Faith does not require dogmas which are true as much as it does dogmas which are pious, i.e., dogmas which move the heart to obedience, even if there are many among them which have not even a shadow of the truth, so long as the person who accepts them does not know them to be false; otherwise he would necessarily be a rebel. For how could it happen that someone who is eager to love Justice and to obey God should worship as divine something he knows to be foreign to the divine nature? [TTP, ch. xiv, §20/G III 176]

Now, many of the dogmas of universal faith are literally true within Spinoza's philosophy. Certainly God exists for Spinoza, as is asserted in the first dogma, at least as he understands what God is. God is certainly unique for Spinoza (dogma II), present everywhere (dogma III), and acts only by his nature (dogma IV). It is, furthermore, not impossible to construe Spinoza's philosophy as holding that worshipping God is just acting with justice and loving-kindness (dogma V) or that only those who live this way can be saved (dogma VI). But there are at least a couple of dogmas in Spinoza's list that are very difficult indeed to fit into his own philosophy. As Spinoza understands God, it is very difficult to construe him as "supremely just and merciful," or "a model [*exemplar*] of true life" or as a "judge." These are definitely anthropomorphic conceptions of God which Spinoza explicitly denies, as we discussed earlier.<sup>11</sup> Nor is it easy to see how Spinoza's philosophy could accommodate the belief that "God pardons the sins of those who repent." Leaving aside the evident anthropomorphism in that dogma, in the *Ethics* Spinoza is quite clear that repentance is inappropriate for the rational person: "Repentance is not a virtue, that is, it does not arise from reason; instead, he who repents what he has done is twice wretched, that is, lacking in power" [E4p54]. Indeed, the whole spirit of the dogmas of universal faith is strikingly inconsistent with Spinoza's philosophy. If the dogmas of

universal faith are supposed to underlie the view of God as the supreme prince and lawgiver, to whom obedience is due and who will punish us for failing to be obedient, then it is very difficult to see how any set of dogmas that could support or follow from obedience could fail to be inconsistent with Spinoza's radically anti-anthropomorphic and anti-teleological view of God in the *Ethics*.

Various commentators have expressed discomfort with the fact that the dogmas of universal faith, which Spinoza seems to advance seriously in the *Theological-Political Treatise* and which at one point in the *Tractatus Politicus* he even seems to propose as the grounds of a minimal state religion [TP, ch. viii, §46], might actually be false. Alexandre Matheron, for example, has proposed an elaborate way of interpreting them so that they come out consistent with the radically non-teleological and non-anthropomorphic doctrine of the *Ethics*.<sup>12</sup> But this isn't really to the point: while the dogmas of universal faith may be made true by a clever reinterpretation of the terms in which they are framed, the anthropomorphic and teleological interpretation under which the dogmas of universal faith are literally false is absolutely central to their efficacy in supporting obedience. It is because the dogmas are understood anthropomorphically, and people believe them to be true in that sense that the multitude thinks of the fundamental moral precept as a *law*, commanded by a divine God, and thus worthy of obedience. Were they to learn the interpretation that makes them true, that is, the interpretation in accordance with which they would be consistent with strict Spinozist principles, they would no longer be anthropomorphic and would no longer support obedience. If they were to replace the anthropomorphic God, the ultimate prince, giver of laws with a true picture of God the Eternal, then they would have no grounds for obedience to moral principles construed as laws.

At this point we can return to the questions with which we started. I began by discussing nexus of anthropomorphism, teleology, and superstition. Spinoza rejected the teleological conception of nature, the view that everything in nature has a purpose, which was put there by agents—God or gods—who act as we do, and chose things for a reason, ultimately in order to induce men to love them and worship them. This teleological conception of nature is closely connected with an anthropomorphic view of God as an agent like us, which, in turn, supports superstition, the attempt to exploit the supposed order of nature and the will of God/the gods for our own personal benefit. In the *Ethics* Spinoza presents a radically different conception of God and nature, one inconsistent with such a teleological and anthropomorphic perspective, and which, thus, leaves no room for superstition. Within the context of the *Ethics*, the philosopher comes

to understand the moral law—to love your neighbor as yourself and to love God above all—as an eternal truth that we follow on the basis of reason alone. However, in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, the situation is quite different. For the imperfectly rational masses, the moral law is presented as a law, which is to be followed out of obedience and not out of understanding. But to be obedient, the imperfectly rational person requires faith, the belief in an omnipotent lawgiver who imposes order on the world, who will reward those who obey his laws, and punish those who violate them: this, in essence, is the teleological conception of nature and an anthropomorphic conception of God. Which is to say, obedience requires that the imperfectly rational person hold a teleological and anthropomorphic conception of nature. While this by itself doesn't entail superstition, it certainly opens the door to it.

What Spinoza has done here is remarkable: he has taken the teleological conception of nature and anthropomorphic conception of God, the fundamental and deep-seated prejudices that ground superstition, and transformed them into something positive, the grounds of obedience to the moral law. The philosopher who can follow the argument of the *Ethics* doesn't need to think about either obedience or the dogmas of universal faith that support it, of course. For the philosopher, the moral law—love your neighbor as yourself and love God above all—is grasped as an eternal truth, something that we can know through reason alone, something binding on us as rational beings. But the imperfectly rational person cannot grasp this. Such a person must be convinced to follow the moral law through other means. In the *Theological-Political Treatise*, I would argue, Spinoza teaches us how to live in such a world of imperfectly rational humanity. Rather than abandoning the common people to superstition and the disorder and unhappiness that it leads to, Spinoza shows how the teleological view of the world toward which the common people are strongly inclined can be used as a support not of superstition but of the moral life. In the opening passage of the *Tractatus Politicus*, Spinoza's last work, he famously writes:

Philosophers conceive the affects which trouble us as vices, into which men fall by their own fault; for that reason they usually laugh at them, weep for them, censure them, or (if they want to seem particularly holy) curse them. In this way they think they perform a godly act and believe they attain the pinnacle of wisdom when they have learned how to praise in many ways a human nature which exists nowhere, and how to assail in words the human nature which really exists. For they conceive men not as they are, but as they wish them to be. That's why for the most part they have written Satire instead of Ethics, and why they have never conceived a Politics which can be put to any practical application.

The Politics they have conceived would be considered a Chimaera, and could be set up only in Utopia, or in the golden age of the Poets—i.e., where there was no need for it at all. [TP, ch. i, §1/G III 273]

In contrast to this, Spinoza proposes a realistic politics, a politics that takes into account people as they really exist. This realistic conception of ethics and politics is brilliantly realized in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, where Spinoza shows us how people as they really are can be led to virtue, surprisingly enough, through the very thing that inclines them to superstition, their irrational tendencies to believe in a teleological order of nature.<sup>13</sup>

## Notes

- 1 In what follows, translations of passages from Spinoza are our own.
- 2 My account here draws on themes from an earlier paper of mine, “Should Spinoza Have Published His Philosophy?” in *Interpreting Spinoza*, ed. Charlie Huenemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
- 3 “The power of reason does not go so far as to enable it to determine that men can be blessed by obedience alone, without understanding things. But Theology teaches nothing but this, and does not command anything but obedience” [TTP, ch. xv, §§22–23/G III 184]; “Nevertheless, we cannot demonstrate by reason whether the foundation of Theology—that men are saved only by obedience—is true or false. So someone may raise against us too the objection: why then do we believe it? If we embrace it without reason, like blind men, then we too act foolishly and without judgment. On the other hand, if we want to maintain that we can demonstrate this foundation rationally, then Theology will be a part of Philosophy, and ought not to be separated from it” [TTP, ch. xv, §§26–27/G III 185].
- 4 The wording here suggests that Spinoza probably also thought that if you believe the appropriate beliefs, those that constitute faith, then it follows that you will also be obedient. That is, that faith is both a necessary *and* a sufficient condition for obedience. In a recent unpublished paper, “Spinoza’s Faith,” Martin Lin has argued that while faith is *necessary* for obedience to the imperatives, it isn’t *sufficient*. That seems quite plausible to me: while a given set of beliefs may make it plausible that I will be obedient, no set of beliefs can *guarantee* obedience: too many things (other desires, beliefs, etc.) can get in the way and undermine action.
- 5 There is a question here as to whether to add a definite article: “*the* universal faith.” In his recently published translation of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Edwin Curley translates this as “tenets of *the* universal faith.” While it is, of course, correct, Latin doesn’t have a definite article and any such addition involves an interpretive

decision. This translation suggests that the dogmas form the basis of a kind of universal religion, a reading that seems wrong to me for reasons I will indicate below.

- 6 It is too strong to say that these conditions *necessitate* obedience, but they may well make obedience more likely. It is because of this that the dogmas of universal faith are necessary but not sufficient conditions of obedience.
- 7 The notes on the *Theological-Political Treatise* that we have seem to have been copied from notes that Spinoza made on his own copy of the *Theological-Political Treatise*. On these notes, see Lagrée and Moreau's remarks in the introduction to Spinoza, *Œuvres III, Traité Théologico-Politique*, ed. and trans. Jacqueline Lagrée and Pierre-François Moreau (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 28–37.
- 8 Thanks to Andrea Sangiacomo for calling this passage to my attention.
- 9 This seems not altogether consistent with what Spinoza says in TTP, ch. iv, §14 [G III 60], where he implies that one cannot really love God unless it is through understanding that this love is the highest good. If taken seriously, this would seem to imply that *obedience* to the imperative to love God above all is strictly speaking impossible.
- 10 The idea of an exemplar of the character toward which we strive is an interesting theme in Spinoza's thought in the TTP. See TTP, ch. xiii, §23 [G III 171] and TTP, ch. xiv, §30 [G III 178]. It is also very prominent in other works, including, the *Tractatus de emendatione intellectus* [TIE, §13, G II 8] and the *Ethics* [E4pr/G II 208]. On this theme see Daniel Garber, "Dr. Fischelson's dilemma: Spinoza on freedom and sociability," in *Spinoza on Reason and the "Free Man,"* ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal (New York: Little Room Press, 2004).
- 11 See TTP, ch. xiii, §24 [G III 171] where Spinoza explicitly notes that the true conception of God is inconsistent with seeing him as a model: "The intellectual knowledge of God, which considers his nature as it is in itself (a nature which men cannot imitate by any particular way of life and cannot take as a model for instituting the true way of life), does not in any way pertain to faith and to revealed religion."
- 12 See Alexandre Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1971), 94–127.
- 13 I would like to thank audiences at the Colloque International Spinoza France États-Unis, as well as at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the University of Pittsburgh, the Istituto per il Lessico Intelletuale Europeo at the University of Rome, La Sapienza, and the NY/New Jersey Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy for comments on earlier versions of this chapter. I owe special thanks to Alan Gabbey, Geneviève Brykman, and especially Chantal Jaquet for their careful readings and extensive comments.

# A Response: Logic of the Superstitious, Logic of the Pious

Chantal Jaquet

Before all else, it is necessary to recognize the success of Daniel Garber's profound reworking of an oral and provisional version of his chapter. Its initial title, *The Political Uses of Superstition*, has given way to its new one: *Anthropomorphism, Teleology, and Superstition: The Politics of Obedience in Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. Far from being a purely cosmetic change, this change reflects a modification in the chapter's basic argument. Its subject now bears less on the positive use of superstition, and more on the transformation of the teleological prejudice and anthropomorphism into unexpected auxiliaries of religion and virtue. In effect, Garber solidly maintains that Spinoza "does not eliminate *the anthropomorphic view of God* completely, but, in a way, transforms it into something positive, something that will lead people to virtue and support the stability of society." To motivate his claim, Garber first examines Elapp and the genesis of the finalistic prejudice that turns to superstition. Moving to the *Theological-Political Treatise's* Preface, Garber then analyzes the causes and nature of superstition, showing how superstition intertwines itself with the illusion of finality in Nature and with an anthropomorphic conception of God. In conclusion, Garber examines the dogmas of the universal faith and the teleological and anthropomorphic vision that sustains these dogmas in order to re-establish the kernel of positivity in the service of a politics of obedience.

Garber's reformulation of his title and argument dissipates a possible ambiguity, which consisted in slipping from superstition to the finalistic prejudice and maintaining their identity in the framework of the dogmas of universal faith. This is why I wholeheartedly support the modifications Garber

has made. The undeniable fact that superstition can be nourished by a teleological vision, and that superstition possesses a structure analogous to the structure of a finalistic mode of thinking, does not imply their assimilation. Similarly, although it is clear that the belief in the dogmas of universal faith, enunciated in chapter 14 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, is sustained by a teleological and anthropomorphic vision of God, this belief does not constitute a form of superstition. In fact, Spinoza is careful to distinguish between what he calls, in the *Theological-Political Treatise*'s Preface,<sup>1</sup> *religio vana*, illusory religion, which is indeed marked by credulity and superstition, and *vera religio*, true religion, which Spinoza associates with true faith and the word of God.<sup>2</sup> Although the true faith does consist in piety and in the obedience to the true dogmas, and does not consist in possessing adequate ideas, the true faith is not, however, reducible to a form of superstitious credulity. The principal mechanism of this belief is not fear (as is the case with superstition), but, rather, confidence in the idea that the love of one's neighbor, that is to say, the practice of justice and charity, assures salvation.

After this preliminary distinction, I will now propose a series of two reflections inspired by Garber, concerning, on the one hand, the logic of the superstitious, and on the other hand, the logic of the pious.

## I. The Logic of the Superstitious

The originality of Garber's approach consists in the fact that he does not merely maintain that as the light chases away the darkness, so does true knowledge chase away the prejudices that result from anthropomorphism, the belief in finality, and superstition, but, rather, that such prejudices remain partially irreducible, and that, moreover, they possess a positivity. The critique of erroneous conceptions does not lead to their systematic eradication. As Spinoza tells us, "Nothing positive which a false idea has is removed by the presence of the true insofar as it is true."<sup>3</sup> Superstition can very well be critiqued, although much as in the manner of one of Bacon's Idols, it will never disappear once and for all.

Garber correctly notes that superstition is born from the fear of losing things that matter to us, and from the desire for the goods of fortune, and he shows how superstition becomes bound up with a teleological and anthropomorphic vision to become a complex of ingrained prejudices. As a complement to Garber's analysis, I would like to underline the reasons for which superstition, despite its

fragile and inconstant nature, cannot be totally eradicated, and in what respect it is by nature irreducible and resistant.

The causes of superstition's persistence are to be found less in the fact that superstition is rooted in the finalistic prejudice than in the nature of fear, which is its true origin, and in the fact that man is necessarily subject to *a logic of the possible*. Superstition is the daughter of the fear bound to our uncertainty about the prospects of our insatiable desires. It is because we do not know whether our strongest desires will be satisfied, and it is because we cannot have a fixed opinion about the matter, that we adopt superstitious beliefs and practices. Suspecting the worst, their purpose is to predict and inflect the course of future events.

When we consider things with an indifferent attitude, our uncertainty surrounding their outcome does not provoke a superstitious attitude in us. If we know that the desired good is certain to be had, we are joyfully secure in our knowledge, and we do not fall prey to superstition. If we know that it is impossible to have the desired good, the fear that causes superstition gives way to sadness and despair. Consequently, if we knew that what we desire is either necessary or impossible, there would be no superstition. It is because we believe that our insatiable desires might possibly come to be or might possibly be prevented that superstition endlessly thrives.

In reality, there are only two known ontological modalities: being or non-being, necessity or impossibility; yet there are three lived modalities: to being and non-being, the ignorant man adds possible being. At E1p33s1, Spinoza specifies that contingent and possible are only appellations, or manners of speaking, grounded in a lack of knowledge. But this lack of knowledge does not lead Spinoza to do without these concepts that in fact become the object of definitions in *Ethics* Part 4:

I call singular things contingent insofar as we find nothing, while we attend only to their essence, which necessarily posits their existence or which necessarily excludes it. [E4d3]

I call the same singular things possible, insofar as, while we attend to the causes from which they must be produced, we do not know whether those causes are determined to produce them. [E4d4]

Modes that do not possess an internal contradiction can be said to be neither impossible nor necessary, in virtue of the fact that their essence does not involve existence. They can therefore be said to be contingent. The question of contingency is displaced onto the question of possibility, inasmuch as it is now a question of knowing whether there are causes that render the existence of things



impossible or necessary, given that nothing in their essence settles the matter. Thus, we cannot do otherwise than to reason with the category of possibility so long as we do not know whether the causes that pose the existence of that which we desire are determined or not to produce it.

This results from our ontological status qua finite modes. We cannot know the infinite series of causes that are determined to produce (or not produce) some event. During the course of a life, it is necessary to consider things as possible. Spinoza says explicitly as much in chapter 4 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*:

Furthermore, we are completely ignorant of the order and connection of things itself, i.e., of how things are really ordered and connected. So for practical purposes it is better, indeed necessary, to consider things as possible.<sup>4</sup>

It is the necessary upkeep of the category of the possible that perpetuates superstition. Rather than appearing to us as necessary or impossible, things appear to us as possible, and as we are prey to the pangs of the *fluctuatio animi*, we try to foresee the unforeseeable to steady our fears. We attempt to tip the balance in our favor by adopting behaviors that defy the ordinary laws of events, because these laws do not give us the answer we want. We look for signs, omens, or miraculous wonders to determine whether there are causes that might possibly produce that which we desire or fear.

If the mechanism of miraculous wonders reproduces the teleological vision, it is not so much the finalistic prejudice that is at work in the structure of omens, as it is imaginative thought paired with an erroneous conception of causality, the latter basing itself in turn on analogies and associations with favorable or unfortunate past situations. "If, while fear makes them turn this way and that, they see something happen which reminds them of some past good or evil, they think it portends either a fortunate or an unfortunate outcome; they call it a favorable or unfavorable omen, even though it may deceive them a hundred times."<sup>5</sup> Confronted with the possible, we cannot but think with signs, because we ignore whether the causes that pose the existence of that which we desire are determined or not to produce it. Tormented by fear, we go so far as to inspect the entrails of animals for clues.

Superstition is rooted in our search for a form of power at the heart of our weakness, because we do not know what will happen and we cannot know what will happen. We act as if everything and its opposite were possible in order to satisfy our immoderate desires. The superstitious attitude constitutes, therefore, an inadequate version of our power of acting. Superstition possesses positivity, since it expresses our refusal to let ourselves be tossed about by blind fortune,

but our search for control is grounded in a misapprehension and reinforces our weakness. In weakness, there is always a power of acting that affirms itself, yet this power is of a lessened or lesser degree, because the action becomes its own opposite. Superstition cannot cease to be, for it is ever reborn from its ashes, the future of our desires never being assured. We can go from one superstition to the next; we cannot go without superstition altogether.

This metaphysical situation explains why the wisest of men is never sheltered from superstition once fortune turns against him. It can also become the object of political exploitation and can precipitate the multitude into servitude, notably within the framework of a monarchical regime. Spinoza notes this in the Preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, when, under the authority of Quintus-Curtius, he writes: "Nothing governs the multitude more effectively than superstition. That's why they are easily led, under the pretext of religion, now to worship their Kings as Gods, now to curse and loathe them as the common plague of the human race."<sup>6</sup> Although "faith is nothing now but credulity and prejudices,"<sup>7</sup> Spinoza will nevertheless distinguish between illusory and true religion. The two are not subject to the same rules, the former obeying the logic of the superstitious, and the latter, the logic of the pious.

## II. The Logic of the Pious

As Garber reminds us, "Faith requires piety more than it does truth."<sup>8</sup> The logic of the pious is not grounded in the norm of truth, but in obedience to the commandment to love one's neighbor. Therefore, it can call both on true and totally erroneous dogmas, on the condition that "provided the person who accepts them does not know they are false."<sup>9</sup> The criterion of their admissibility consists in their aptitude to force man to obey the divine commandment. In this framework, prejudices can be permitted by virtue of their capacity to induce charitable and just behavior.

In this way, Garber brings to light a reversal of perspective that takes place in Spinoza's work and that often passes unremarked. Garber shows how the teleological vision of the world and the anthropomorphic conception of God, critiqued in the Appendix to *Ethics* Part 1, can have salutary effects by becoming auxiliaries necessary for the moral well-being of men who do not live under the guidance of reason. Garber is right to underline that this recycling of prejudices in the service of the law to love one's neighbor and to practice the cult of justice and charity is rooted in the fact that not all people are equally capable of

conceiving of the rules of living as *eternal truths*, and that most conceive of such rules as *commandments* which they are beholden to obey. In virtue of this, we can only but agree with Garber, when he writes in conclusion:

But to be obedient, the imperfectly rational person requires faith, the belief in an omnipotent law-giver who imposes order on the world, who will reward those who obey his laws and punish those who violate them: this, in essence, is the teleological conception of nature and an anthropomorphic conception of God. Which is to say, obedience requires that the imperfectly rational person hold a teleological and anthropomorphic conception of nature.

In the spirit of Garber's analysis, I would like to underline that not merely the teleological and anthropomorphic conception is positively reintroduced within the framework of the dogmas of universal faith, but also all the opinions and prejudices necessary for obedience. The logic of the pious is by essence a logic of the imagination, in virtue of the fact that everyone adapts the dogmas to their own understanding and interprets them according to his own mentality. Therefore, the entirety of the first kind of knowledge finds itself reinstated and restored to the degree that it can serve as an auxiliary to obedience. Far from banishing all imaginative ideas and opinions, Spinoza presents them as imperative necessities:

Each person is bound to accommodate [*accommodare tenetur*] these doctrines of faith to his own power of understanding, and to interpret them for himself, as it seems to him easier for him to accept them without any hesitation, with complete agreement of the heart, so that he may obey God wholeheartedly. For as we've already noted, the faith was originally revealed and written according to the grasp and opinions of the Prophets, and of the common people of that time. In the same way, everyone now is bound to accommodate it to his own opinions, so that he can accept it without any mental conflict and without any hesitation.<sup>10</sup>

Once more, we observe a reversal in Spinoza's perspective: whereas in the Appendix to *Ethics* Part 1, the diversity of opinions is held to be a source of controversy and a bearer of discord, it becomes, in chapter 14 of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, the pre-requisite for efficacious obedience and a pillar of concord, thanks to the practice of justice and charity. As a consequence of this logic of the pious, therefore, there is a positivity to be found in the diversity of opinions, even with respect to the most fantastical and stupid opinions. Furthermore, this is the reason for which "each person must be allowed freedom of judgment and the power to interpret the foundations of faith according to his own mentality."<sup>11</sup> From the point of view of faith, little does it matter that

some imagine salvation or perdition in the form of a heaven of houris or hellfire, or that some think, in agreement with Solomon, that the punishment of the ignorant is ignorance itself, so long as all obey the law to love one's neighbor. At play here is the recognition of the fact that inherent in the imagination is an efficacy and performativity superior to the sort possessed by reason, in virtue of the fact that reason's universal character has a lesser affect on the vulgar mind than do singular opinions adapted to its mentality. The best reasons do not always produce the best works. In the framework of the logic of the pious, this is why a good prejudice may be preferable to a true judgment.

## Notes

- 1 TTP, pref., §9: "*religionem veram aut vanam*" [G III 7].
- 2 Cf. TTP, ch. xii, §2 [G III 159].
- 3 E4p1.
- 4 TTP, ch. iv, §4 [G III 58].
- 5 TTP, pref., §3 [G III 5].
- 6 TTP, pref., §8 [G III 6].
- 7 TTP, pref., §16 [G III 8].
- 8 TTP, ch. xiv, §33 [G III 179].
- 9 TTP, ch. xiv, §20 [G III 176].
- 10 TTP, ch. xiv, §§32–33 [G III 178–179].
- 11 TTP, pref., §28 [G III 11].



## *Individual and Community* and Its American Legacy

Steven Barbone

Those of us who gathered for the conference, *Spinoza France États-Unis*, are familiar—thanks to the many, detailed, and in-depth works on Spinoza that they have produced—with the names of the most important French Spinoza scholars: Martial Gueroult, Alexandre Matheron, Louis Althusser, and Pierre Macherey. We also recognize the names of many of those who gathered with us at this conference: Étienne Balibar, Pierre-François Moreau, Chantal Jaquet, Charles Ramond, Laurent Bove, Pascal Sévérac, Jacqueline Lagrée, and others. I said, “Those of us gathered for the conference” because in other places, especially in monolingual countries such as the United States, most of these names are hardly recognizable. There are, however, some exceptions, but for those authors who are more known in the United States, it is rather for their work that does not directly concern Spinoza. For example, Louis Althusser is much admired for his work on Marxism, but not for his studies on Spinozism, even though he declared: “We were Spinozists.” But pay attention to the verb tense: we were Spinozists, not that we are today. Very few in the United States think about Gilles Deleuze and Spinoza despite his translated books, *Practical Spinoza* and *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. Deleuze is more remembered for his work on transcendental empiricism and his book, *Difference and Repetition*. Étienne Balibar—who had a position at the University of California at Irvine—is perhaps the best-known French Spinozist in the United States because of his book, *Spinoza et la politique*, translated into English since 1998 as *Spinoza and Politics* and also for several other texts, also translated into English. However, among Americans, Balibar is more generally identified with his mentor, Louis Althusser, and as such more of a Marxist thinker than a Spinozist.

Among French commentators who are recognized as Spinozists, their works remain hidden or inaccessible behind the veil of monolingualism in the United States. That is why, despite his monumental contribution to Spinoza studies, even Moreau's works are not so well known in the United States except for some that have been translated into English and are parts of anthologies. Alexandre Matheron's contributions have suffered the same destiny with very few translations of his articles, mainly as parts of anthologies.

These opening remarks on the small number of translations and dissemination of French thought on Spinoza does not mean that French thought on Spinoza remains unknown among us overall monolingual Americans. French influence does show itself in American thought on Spinoza, and it's not hiding. Still, it remains rather in the background, underlying how American scholars even formulate important questions that arise about Spinoza.

But first, let's look to the past. According to Lorenzo Vinciguerra, despite a few in-depth studies—e.g., those of Victor Delbos, Jules Lagneau, Alain, Léon Brunschvicg, Pierre Lachière-Rey—interest in Spinoza was relatively less pronounced until the 1960s in France (or the United States, for that matter).<sup>1</sup> During the first half of the last century, existentialism was rather more fashionable in France and logical positivism in the United States. Everything changed toward the end of the 1960s with the two great books on Parts 1 and 2 of the *Ethics* by Martial Gueroult along with, as Moreau notes, Matheron's "most remarkable" book, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*.<sup>2</sup> The publication of this book, largely ignored by Anglophones, caused Louis Althusser to give up his plans on teaching his Spinoza course at the École Normale Supérieure, in 1969, and instead offer a different course on Jean Jacques Rousseau because, as Althusser declared, Matheron's study had already said everything that he had intended to say about Spinoza.<sup>3</sup>

However, Matheron—perhaps "the greatest commentator on Spinoza's philosophy"<sup>4</sup>—opened the door to plenty of work on the problems of individuation in Spinoza and the priority (or the primacy) of the individual citizen over the community or, conversely, of the primacy of the State over its subjects. On this important issue, I think explicitly of the French seeds that have been sown in American soil, seeds that have already produced their fruit in American thought. The reader may decide if this harvest is any good.

Bove was right when he noted that Matheron's work opened up a double bifurcation: first, there is Spinoza's rupture within the heart of modern philosophy itself and then also another rupture, the one Matheron's interpretation caused in contemporary history of philosophy. I would like to mention there is yet

another prong that also finds its origins in Matheron's reading, and this raises the following question: Does Spinoza give us a philosophy of the individual or a philosophy of the community? Metaphysically and even politically, which is prior, individual or community?

How is the "communitarian" reading of Spinoza characterized? Ted Stolze explains this in his study:

Anglophone Marxists have scarcely engaged with the work of the French philosopher Alexandre Matheron, whose 1969 book *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* is widely regarded as a landmark of Spinoza scholarship. Yet Matheron's book is also a sustained Marxist intervention into the history of philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

Matheron's reading of Spinoza may, indeed, qualify as "Marxist" in the sense that it sees the definition of a collective end in the philosophy of Spinoza. For this collective end, Spinoza would have thus written a "politics of the third kind."<sup>6</sup> This means that there is, therefore, for human individuals, a collective life that exists beyond the imperium.<sup>7</sup> And, in the same way that in this community (of Marxist obedience) that individuals share all material goods, they share as well the same mind. Stolze writes that for Matheron, the purpose of community is to give "complete satisfaction to our individual and interhuman conatuses: surpassing all alienations and divergences; an actualization of the I in the most complete lucidity, an actualization of the We in the most complete of communions."<sup>8</sup>

If we follow Stolze's commentary on Matheron, we understand that this particular reading of Matheron puts the community above the individual, who is nothing more than a means to an end. The "I" exists only for the "We" who perfects itself insofar as individuals perfect themselves. Stolze's reading is thus characteristic of communitarian interpretation that has been done in the United States on Matheron's book.

But this is not the only interpretation of his book, for there are others who instead find support in it for the idea of the priority of the individual over the community. Based on his reading of *Individu et communauté*, Lee Rice of Marquette University taught this second perspective to his own group of scholars. His reading revolves around a fixed point: the power of the individual. Douglas Den Uyl, one of Rice's students, argued for the affirmation of the individual in the face of the political community when he published his work, *Power, State, and Freedom: An Interpretation of Spinoza's Political Philosophy* in 1983. In this book, he supported the primacy of the individual over the community by emphasizing that Spinoza himself was a methodological individualist.<sup>9</sup> There are, says Den



Uyl, only individuals who are citizens, and the state is nothing but a human-made condition for their salvation. The community thus is “not something organic, but simply [...] the effective organization of individual power.”<sup>10</sup> According to Den Uyl, for Spinoza, society is only a dynamic process, a continuous activity of individuals—i.e., the people who make it up—and their interactions. There is therefore nothing but the relationships and connections between the actions of the individuals who are powers in themselves. The community is nothing other than the citizens themselves bound by the common laws that describe all social actions. The community’s laws are, therefore, sustained only by the individual forces of its citizens. In the final analysis, then, we have to say that it is the individual person who is the more important.

Rice continued this Matheronian line of thought concerning the power to act with his studies on nominalism from 1994.<sup>11</sup> Rice sees a strictly nominalist metaphysics in Spinoza that allows only discreet individuals. We can thus use set theory to explain how we speak of dogs, things, people, and so forth: these terms are only names of sets of individual things collected in a group. As a student of Rice, in 2002, I again asked the question: What is an individual for Spinoza?<sup>12</sup> In that study, I suggest that the political state is not an individual in the Spinozistic sense but only an *ens rationis*. Together with Rice in 2005, I continued this reflection on the relationship between the individual and the state, and we again definitively concluded that the political State is not an individual but only a means or a tool by which people can preserve themselves.<sup>13</sup> The State exists for the citizens and not citizens for the state.

This interpretation of Spinoza is possible thanks to the work of Matheron on the power of individuals, and it also could well be that this reading should be useful in the case we interest ourselves with other big metaphysical questions.

It is questionable, however, whether Matheron himself would agree with this latter interpretation, and the answer is definitely “No.” In a letter he sent me after the appearance of a co-authored essay with Rice in a book prepared in his honor, *Architectures de la raison: mélanges offerts à Alexandre Matheron*, Matheron confirmed, in fact, that he was not in agreement with our interpretation but that he was happy that it was his thought that occasioned it.<sup>14</sup>

And I think I know why he was nevertheless happy. It is really thanks to the Matheronian interpretation that Rice and I have been able to apply the Spinozistic power theory to the problems of contemporary society: first the problem of the suicide, then the question of sexual identity,<sup>15</sup> then new political actions such as those of feminism, and so on. Matheron’s reading, from the point of view of the individual’s power, has opened the door to contemporary relevance in Spinoza

studies. So here indeed is a third way of reading Spinoza: he is a philosopher who belongs to the history of philosophy, of course, but he also belongs to our present. It is this perspective that no doubt pleased Matheron, who himself has done studies on Spinoza and women, Spinoza and sexuality, etc.

Thus, Matheron gives us an interpretation from the point of view of individual power, and his American heirs widely developed this aspect of his work. The second prong suggested in Laurent Bove's article, namely, the quiet impact of Matheron's work on contemporary thought, has also borne fruits in the United States where the Matheronian interpretation has produced two types of reading Spinoza: a Spinoza who is part of the history of philosophy and a Spinoza who continues to play an important role for understanding of our own contemporaneity. No one is obliged to adhere to this or that interpretation, but it's clear here that an American windfall is the result of a French seed.

## Notes

- 1 Lorenzo Vinciguerra, "Spinoza in French Philosophy Today," *Philosophy Today* 53, no. 4 (2009): 422–437. See esp. 432.
- 2 Pierre-François Moreau, "Spinoza's Reception and Influence," trans. Roger Ariew, in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 430.
- 3 Ted Stolze, "Revisiting a Marxist Encounter with Spinoza: Alexandre Matheron on Militant Reason and Intellectual Love of God," *Crisis & Critique* 2, no. 1 (2015): 152–169. See esp. 153.
- 4 See Laurent Bove's contribution to this volume.
- 5 Stolze, "Revisiting a Marxist Encounter," 153.
- 6 Ibid., 162.
- 7 Ibid., 158.
- 8 Ibid., 163. Stolze is translating Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et Communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969), 613.
- 9 Douglas Den Uyl, *Power, State, and Freedom: An Interpretation of Spinoza's Political Philosophy* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1983), 67.
- 10 Ibid., 71.
- 11 See Lee Rice, "Spinoza's Nominalism," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 24, no. 1 (1994): 19–32.
- 12 See Steven Barbone, "What Counts as an Individual for Spinoza?" in *Spinoza: Metaphysical Themes*, ed. John Biro and Olli Koistinen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

- 13 See Steven Barbone and Lee Rice, "Individu et État chez Spinoza," *NASS Monograph* 12 (2005): 1–30.
- 14 See Steven Barbone and Lee Rice, "La naissance d'une nouvelle politique," in *Architectures de la Raison: Mélanges Offerts à Alexandre Matheron*, ed. Pierre-François Moreau (Fontenay-aux-Roses: ENS Éditions, 1997).
- 15 For a recent discussion of Spinoza and sexuality in French, see Bernard Pautrat, *Ethica sexualis: Spinoza et l'amour* (Paris: Rivages, 2011).

# A Response: Between Matheron and Spinoza, Something Happens ...

Laurent Bove

Alexandre Matheron is known, by philosophers and historians of philosophy, as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, commentators on Spinoza's philosophy.<sup>1</sup> His oeuvre consists of two major works: *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* and *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants chez Spinoza*.<sup>2</sup> These works were followed, over the course of nearly thirty years, by a multitude of papers on Early Modern philosophy. These papers, previously published in journals or conference proceedings, were collected a few years ago in a superb volume published by the ENS with a preface by Pierre-François Moreau.<sup>3</sup> The publication of these texts came at a significant moment in the reception of Matheron's work. For Matheron, whose work on Early Modern philosophy had been a reference point for French students and researchers in philosophy since the 1970s, was not only a universally recognized historian of philosophy, but also—and without having had to forsake his specialization as a historian of Early Modern philosophy, and in particular of Spinoza's philosophy—a thinker whose works had gradually modified (and continue silently to work upon) contemporary thought. This second aspect of Matheron's work's reception and its consequences has only been manifest (or effectively recognized) since the 2000s, the years which saw researchers in diverse disciplines and figures of cultural and political life not only pay homage to his works, but also and especially take inspiration from them, while pointing to the power of his works outside the domain of their initial investigation. The re-publication of his papers allow us now to better understand the reasons for these two aspects or effects of Matheron's work—aspects or

effects which are inseparable given that *all* his studies have had, as their unique object, seventeenth-century philosophy. Matheron has never claimed to be anything other than a specialist of Spinoza's philosophy and of the Early Modern period. In 1997, when Moreau and I asked him for an interview with the aim of returning to his philosophical trajectory, Matheron was extremely surprised and asked us (with complete sincerity) "who" could be interested in such an interview! As always when asked for advice or when questioned about Spinoza, Matheron proved entirely willing, though he could not imagine that his answers would be read by many people with great attentiveness.

First and above all, Matheron is a thinker with a *rigorous method* and with great expertise in the history of philosophy; but he is also the thinker and the initiator of what Antonio Negri has called a *bifurcation* at the heart of philosophy.<sup>4</sup> A double bifurcation even, which concerns not only the rupture carried out by Spinoza at the heart of Early Modern philosophy, but also the rupture at the heart of contemporary thought, which Matheron's reading of Spinoza made possible after 1968. Following our presentation of the works of Matheron and of the place within them of his *Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies de l'âge classique*, we will return, in conclusion, to the second aspect of this reception.

## I. From Methodological Kinship to Hermeneutic Displacement

Matheron, treating the *methodological* question which every interpreter of Spinoza has to ask himself, writes that there are "two ways of approaching the question of the coherence or incoherence of the *Ethics*: either one takes into account the 'order of reasons,' as Spinoza wanted, or one doesn't. If one doesn't take it into account, then one can effectively attribute to Spinoza all the contradictions one wishes. [...] But I believe that, if one decides to do it [to take the geometric order seriously], one discovers in the *Ethics* a great logical coherence."<sup>5</sup>

Matheron's commentary strives above all to demonstrate this coherence, not only with respect to the *Ethics* but with respect to Spinoza's oeuvre as a whole, whose architectonics Matheron explores by indefatigably taking on points of difficulty and key moments so as to test, and finally to demonstrate, its solidity. In this, Matheron follows the path already laid out by a great work written by a master of the history of philosophy, Martial Gueroult's *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons*.<sup>6</sup> From Gueroult, who was Matheron's "godfather" at the CNRS, Matheron essentially takes the structural method put in place in *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons*, a work which functions for Matheron as "a genuine ideal model."<sup>7</sup>

During the preparation of *Individu et communauté*, Matheron did not know the precise contents of Gueroult's two forthcoming commentary on *Spinoza*.<sup>8</sup> Gueroult certainly spoke to him at length of his first volume which would appear at the end of 1968, a few months before Matheron's *Individu et communauté*, though the second volume would not appear until 1974. And Matheron followed Gueroult in adopting the architectonic approach to the oeuvre, and also with regard to Spinoza's "absolute rationalism," as Gueroult writes, which will become, in Matheron, not only a abstract principle but also *the* Spinozist project to be indefinitely pursued and realized, the "integral intelligibility of the real."

Nonetheless, Matheron produces an entirely different illumination of the Dutch philosopher's thought by sharply displacing the oeuvre's center of gravity. If he remains, first of all, largely faithful to Gueroult's methodical reading of the *Ethics*, his commentary on Spinoza, however, commences with the elucidation of two key concepts, that of the "individual" and that of the "community," with regard to the theory of *conatus* and the intellectual love of God in *Ethics* Part 5. This means that he will place at the system's heart the physical theory of the communication of movement (which defines *an* individual in Part 2) as well as the theory of affects and their communication (in Part 3). With this, and with what Matheron shows of the political and constitutive applicability of the theory of the passions, the political theory became central. This is a domain that wasn't of great interest to Gueroult or Spinoza scholarship in general. The latter, following the Anglo-Saxon countries, equated Spinoza's political theory with that of Hobbes, seeing in it nothing more than an unfortunate act of plagiarism without interest; or else, by contrast, one enacted a fictitious opposition between Spinoza and Hobbes by superimposing onto the author of the *Theological-Political Treatise* the belief in liberal contractualism as opposed to a Hobbesian theory of the right of the strongest thus entailing two misreadings of both Hobbes and of Spinoza!<sup>9</sup> By following Gueroult on the methodological level, Matheron was also therefore able to radically mutate Spinoza's reading, interpretation, and reception.

## II. Sublating Gueroult, Rediscovering Delbos

Commentators, Matheron writes in his study "Les deux Spinoza de Victor Delbos," had taken little interest in the political theory of the philosopher from Amsterdam since the first work of Delbos, that is to say, since 1893!<sup>10</sup> Delbos—whose second book from 1916, *Le spinozisme*,<sup>11</sup> Gueroult claims, according to

Matheron, “is never wrong”—was one of the few commentators Matheron read while preparing his own work. Indeed, Delbos is a commentator who, before Gueroult, had already introduced an “immanent critique” of Spinozism.<sup>12</sup> Matheron would return in 1998 to Delbos’s first work, to Delbos’s intuitions and to “truths which, [he] believed, had become, as [Delbos] said, our shared inheritance,”<sup>13</sup> “truths” which the “second” Delbos had, however, further “refined” during a specific historical context—that of the First World War—in which “the criteria of philosophical respectability had changed,” and in which it was a matter of carefully dealing with all the “themes” that give the appearance of “coming from across the Rhine.”<sup>14</sup> Matheron points then to the “expansion of often profound, always fertile sketches” of Delbos’s first book, and to its themes, “full of a promising future,”<sup>15</sup> the exploration of which his own research, in his *Études sur Spinoza*, will be devoted. Among such sketches, Matheron was drawn to Delbos’s treatment of the theme of “life” which, as Matheron underlines, is not limited to a “vitalist Romanticism” to which it is too often reduced; the (correlative) analysis of the *conatus*, the effort made by each being to persevere in its being, “in terms of the freedom” which comes to “dynamize” nature and which anticipates Matheron’s own discovery of an *ontologie de la puissance* (“ontology of power”) [*potentia*]; and finally, the reading, of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, certainly brief but irreproachable, wherein one finds Delbos taking seriously, according to the principle of Spinozist politics, the identification of *droit* (“right”) [*jus*] and *puissance* (“power”) [*potentia*] that moves toward delivering the analyses of the genesis of the State “from all recourses to any contractualism,”<sup>16</sup> and also, already, toward the discovery of “an outline of a theory of History” at the same time as toward “a very refined structural analysis of the self-regulating mechanisms of the State,”<sup>17</sup> a perspective which Matheron himself will not cease to enrich and deepen.

These forgotten flashes of insight from 1893, which Delbos had later carefully repressed during the First World War, are taken back up in Matheron’s first commentary on Spinoza. If we understand the great lineage Delbos-Gueroult-Matheron, it is fitting, if paradoxical, that, as Matheron explains, he will have by that same time “begun to *sublate* Gueroult”!<sup>18</sup> But this sublation is not fully carried out until the 1980s, as Matheron specifies, those years in which the vast majority of the articles that today compose the collection (*Études sur Spinoza*) were written. For example, at the very beginning of *Individu et communauté* Matheron advances the idea of substance as “pure activity” (an idea which, Matheron specifies, comes from Pierre Lachière-Rey,<sup>19</sup> and which will in turn motivate his reading of Being, in Spinoza, as genesis and productivity). This

interpretation is grounded in the Spinozist theory of genetic definition in the *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, and not in the *Ethics* itself and its theory of power. Yet during this period, Matheron, still too Gueroultian, had left this point in parentheses. So forgotten was the theory of genetic definition, moreover, that Matheron had to nourish himself solely on Gueroult's two volume commentary on Spinoza; likewise, the theory of power in *Ethics* Part 1 will only truly be understood *after the fact*, beginning with the studies of the 1980s when Matheron, *sublating* Gueroult, revived his own first ideas.

### III. A Dynamic Ontology

If we begin by taking into account this movement made up of primary intuitions, of forgetting them, and then of later returning to them, it is equally possible to outline a hypothesis regarding the general meaning of the trajectory of Matheron's commentary leading to the *Études sur Spinoza*. From his two great works to his articles, and across the years in which these studies were written, Matheron, it seems, imperceptibly displaces his approach to Spinozism from a philosophy that could be qualified as a structural philosophy of "necessity" (a dominant style in the 1960s and 1970s, due to both the over-determining effects of the Althusserian reading of Spinoza and Marx and the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss<sup>20</sup>) to a philosophy of the real movement of productive power and of "freedom." This approach consists in insisting much more strongly on the dynamic features of a Nature that produces infinite things in infinite ways and which envelops the immanent identity of God-Nature and of the thing. Granted, this is only a displacement of tone: according to either approach, freedom is always substance's "free necessity" and/or individuals' "adequate causality." But this displacement operates a certain theoretical and practical inflection in that it liberates the interpretation of Spinoza not from the real necessity of the Real itself but from its determinist structural hypostasis and from its physico-mathematical model.<sup>21</sup> And this in order to grasp and demonstrate, from the point of view of a dynamic ontology, all the power, productive diversity and freedom of Nature and/or of singular things. The intuition of *Individu et communauté* which is asserted from its, that "every individual is partially or totally self-producing [...] and due to this self-productivity, it can be considered, under analysis, either as *Naturing* or as *Natured*," could thereby plainly affirm itself in the concept of a self-organizing Nature which "is thus the productive activity immanent to all things, which



gives to itself, inexhaustibly, all logically possible structures.”<sup>22</sup> Matheron specifies that:

Each singular thing, in as much as it is *God Himself* to the extent that He gives Himself this or that determinate structure, necessarily produces effects in the frame of this structure: for *all things*, definitively, *to exist is to produce effects*. This leads us directly to the theory of *conatus*, which the entirety of Part 1 has made it possible to rigorously ground.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, Matheron’s interpretation of *Ethics* Part 1, which is intended to show how Part 1 grounds the *conatus* doctrine, is at present free from the Gueroultian lineage that, for many years, had been an obstacle to the direct reading of the thought of power [*potentia*] and of its fertility. Now, by contrast, Matheron establishes an “ontology of power” [*potentia*] issued from a kind of “second foundation” in the *Ethics*, one nourished by the whole political theory and the theory of History and which is correlated to a re-appraisal of the unity of the writing of the *Ethics* itself.<sup>24</sup> This taking into account of the political theory and the theory of History has, as another consequence, an ontological radicalization that Matheron also carries out at the heart of his commentary, thereby marking his independence, once again, with regard to Gueroult but also, it must be underlined, with regard to a certain Marxism and a certain, orthodox relation between Spinoza and Marx. Thus, Matheron declares:

At the beginning, I began to study Spinoza because I saw in him someone who had the great merit, beyond the limits that his class perspective imposed on him, to be a precursor of Marx; now, I more have the tendency to see in Marx someone who has the great merit of being one of the successors of Spinoza in certain domains.<sup>25</sup>

Whence comes the second aspect of the *political* reception of Matheron, wherein the reading of Spinoza has the *effect* of *making Spinozism itself exist ever more powerfully*.

#### IV. From the “Vulgar” to the “Infamous”

Such is the meaning of Matheron’s impressive study, “Le statut ontologique de l’Écriture sainte et la doctrine spinoziste de l’individualité,” which offers an analysis of the passage from the “semantic” point of view to the “pragmatic” one<sup>26</sup>—an analysis that is altogether original as a dynamic theory of interpretation and of writing’s reception and effects. “*Exister c’est puissance*”

(existence is power) [*potentia*] and power [*potentia*] exists only in and through its effects: this is what this study, extremely prescient for its applicability elsewhere, develops with regard to the example of writing. What, in effect, does Matheron there teach us? That writing, like “every publicly exposed system [...] including that of Spinoza himself,”<sup>27</sup> is defined and *exists more or less powerfully* only “according to the use” its readers make of it. “It seems then that the ontological status of writing, *and no doubt of all works in general*,<sup>28</sup> is that of a complex individuality comprised of essential parts, an ensemble of men engaged in a certain type of practice, functioning according to determinate rules. An individuality somewhat analogous, fundamentally, to that of political society.”<sup>29</sup> This reflection is directly transposable to Matheron’s own practice of commentary and its consequences. In effect, while many intellectuals, including Matheron himself, take their distance from traditional Marxism, nonetheless the *reading* Matheron makes of Spinoza in the 1970s and 1980s makes it possible, as Negri forcefully underlines, not only to provide the *theoretical and political power* to “refuse all the variants, “strong” or “weak,” of the thought of *krisis*”<sup>30</sup> but also and especially to allow us “to start to rebuild, on the terrain of Spinozism, a revolutionary perspective.”<sup>31</sup>

This new perspective is, however differently, also of interest to the sciences. Matheron shows the degree to which the ontology of power was not only a central concern “at the height of the scientific revolution of the 17th-Century: it was conceptually on the same level during all subsequent scientific revolutions.”<sup>32</sup> Regarding the social sciences, Yves Citton (a specialist, among other things, in eighteenth-century literature) and Frédéric Lordon (a social and economic theorist) write that, with Matheron, “a meticulous, rigorous and inspired interpretation gives a glimpse of the power, the radicality, and the originality of the Spinozan construction of the social” in that the author, through the specificity of his commentary, carries out “a true translation of the *Ethics* and the *Political Treatise* into a language and a mode of reasoning with which large numbers of researchers [in the social sciences] are likely to find themselves spontaneously in accord.”<sup>33</sup> What is thus remarkable and exceptional in Matheron is that it is in holding strictly to his role as a historian of philosophy that his work has escaped its domain and can now respond to the expectations of our time.<sup>34</sup>

Inversely, it was not without some resistance, nor indignation, from the traditional philosophical world—which Matheron recalls with amusement—that the work was first welcomed. First “totally ignored or despised”<sup>35</sup> at the heart of the university, my work, says Matheron, was next denounced for “the crime of inhumanity,”<sup>36</sup> then qualified as “vulgarity,” or in other words

“infamy.”<sup>37</sup> A crime of inhumanity, apparently, when Matheron brutally declares, but not without precise demonstrations, that “Spinoza, strictly speaking, *theoretically* doesn’t know what man is, and he does just fine: he doesn’t need to know it to edify his system.”<sup>38</sup> Spinoza, who does not define the specific essence of man sticks, according to Matheron, to a greater level of generality, that of a supra-specific essence, which, *for the needs of practice and/or the use of common life*, opens onto the category of the “similar” below and beyond the human. There is indeed a human nature, but Matheron shows that there is no need to base oneself on it to develop an ethics! And that it is even because one can do without its presupposition that an ethics open to what is different (and nonetheless “similar”) is *practically* possible and necessary. As for the qualifications of vulgar and infamous, it is because of the *radicalization* of his reading of Spinoza’s political theory that Matheron inherits while also daring to affirm that it is evidently that of Spinoza himself. If the *Theological-Political Treatise* indeed already clearly identifies *droit* (“right”) [*jus*] with *puissance* (“power”), that book still employs a language of natural right doctrines. Now, according to Matheron, Spinoza would have been able to do without the notion of the contract beginning with the *Theological-Political Treatise*; and it is indeed for him a proof of theoretical “maturation” that in the *Political Treatise* the social contract disappears. It is because of this, Matheron claims, that he was accused of “vulgarity, since it is well known,” he mockingly continues, “that a great philosopher, without very special authorization, does not evolve, and certainly not in the wrong direction!”<sup>39</sup> When, thereafter, Matheron arrives at considering the contractualism of the *Theological-Political Treatise* as only, in truth, “an exoteric adaptation of the doctrine of the *Political Treatise*” (thereby indicating that Spinoza already had this insight in 1670), the interpreter’s so-called “vulgarity” thus becomes, in the eyes of his adversaries, as he puts it himself, an “infamy,” an “infamy” which, beyond academic polemics, overflowed its field to become a material social force.

Just as enlightening and passionate as reading Spinoza himself, reading Matheron’s studies is certainly just as demanding. Yet in both cases knowledge is within easy reach of all those who decide to freely use their reason. For it is only a matter of allowing oneself to be patiently and *actively* guided “as if by the hand,” following the expression of the *Ethics*, by *demonstrations* whose validity we are ourselves invited to verify. We are left with the knowledge that in Matheron as in Spinoza, in the process of this remarkable exercise, it is nearly always ourselves, our lives, and our history which are also in question.

## Notes

- 1 Our title refers to a phrase spoken by Louis Althusser at the ENS in 1972, reported in Laurent Bove and Pierre-François-Moreau, "À propos de Spinoza: Entretien avec Alexandre Matheron," *Multitudes* 3 (2000): 169–200.
- 2 Alexandre Matheron, *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1969) and Alexandre Matheron, *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1971).
- 3 Alexandre Matheron, *Études sur Spinoza et les philosophies de l'âge classique* (Lyon: ENS Éditions, 2011).
- 4 See Antonio Negri, *Spinoza for Our Time: Politics and Postmodernity*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).
- 5 Matheron, *Études*, 457.
- 6 Martial Gueroult, *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons*, 2 vols (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1953).
- 7 Bove, and Moreau, "À propos de Spinoza," 171.
- 8 Martial Gueroult, *Spinoza 1: Dieu* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968) and Gueroult, *Spinoza 2: L'âme* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1974).
- 9 In Matheron, *Études*, see "Le « droit du plus fort »: Hobbes contre Spinoza" and "Le problème de l'évolution de Spinoza. Du *Traité théologico-politique* au *Traité politique*." See also Matheron's studies in comparative analysis and his studies of Hobbes: "La fonction théorique de la démocratie chez Spinoza et Hobbes"; "Politique et religion chez Hobbes et Spinoza"; "Obligation morale et obligation juridique selon Hobbes"; "Hobbes, la Trinité et les caprices de la représentation."
- 10 See Victor Delbos *Le problème moral dans la philosophie de Spinoza et dans l'histoire du spinozisme* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1893). [Republished in 1990 by the Groupe de Recherches Spinozistes for the Presses de l'Université de Paris Sorbonne with a preface by Alexandre Matheron.]
- 11 See Victor Delbos, *Le spinozisme*, revised edn (Paris: Vrin, 2005).
- 12 Matheron, *Études*, 440.
- 13 Ibid., 442.
- 14 Ibid., 443.
- 15 Ibid., 439.
- 16 Ibid., 444.
- 17 Ibid., 445.
- 18 Bove, and Moreau, "A propos de Spinoza," 180.
- 19 See Pierre Lachizièze-Rey, *Les origines cartésiennes du Dieu de Spinoza* (Paris: Vrin, 1950).
- 20 Cf. Matheron, *Études*, 180.

- 21 “In *Individu et communauté* I have a bit too much of a tendency to want to create a physico-mathematical model for *every* type of individual. I had the tendency to think that everything could be mathematized ” (ibid., 183).
- 22 Ibid., 577.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid., 457.
- 25 Bove, and Moreau, “A propos de Spinoza,” 176.
- 26 See Alexandre Matheron, “*Le statut ontologique de l’Écriture sainte et la doctrine spinoziste de l’individualité*,” in Matheron, *Études*.
- 27 Ibid., 415.
- 28 My italics.
- 29 Ibid., 413.
- 30 See Negri, *Spinoza for Our Time*, 27. Negri writes “krisis” in reference Massimo Cacciari, *Krisis: Saggio sulla crisi del pensiero negative da Nietzsche a Wittgenstein* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976).
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Matheron, *Études*, 599.
- 33 See Yves Citton and Frédéric Lordon, ed., *Spinoza et les sciences sociales: De la puissance de la multitude à l’économie des affects* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam 2008), 26–27.
- 34 Unlike the Spinozist *philosopher* Gilles Deleuze, whom Matheron admires without being influenced by.
- 35 Bove, and Moreau, “A propos de Spinoza,” 198.
- 36 Alexandre Matheron, “Modes et genres de connaissance (*Traité de la réforme de l’entendement*, paragraphes 18 à 29),” in Matheron, *Études*, 473, note.
- 37 Ibid., 462.
- 38 Alexandre Matheron, “L’anthropologie spinoziste ?” in Matheron, *Études*, 19.
- 39 Alexandre Matheron, “*L’Anomalie sauvage* d’Antonio Negri,” in Matheron, *Études*, 462.

## Spinoza's Formulation of the Radical Enlightenment's Two Foundational Concepts: How Much Did He Owe to the Dutch Golden Age Political-Theological Context?

Jonathan Israel

Practically all modern scholars who study the *cercle spinoziste* tie the group phenomenon, the emergence of the Radical Enlightenment framework in its earliest manifestation, to the fact that the United Provinces were republican and not monarchical, were religiously pluriform not uniform, lacked a strong state church, and were a society where censorship was comparatively weak. To this we might add that the ruling oligarchy lacked genuinely aristocratic credentials and were mostly an informal rentier oligarchy. Dutch Golden Age culture, moreover, was a milieu in which Cartesianism scored a precocious and unparalleled general breakthrough in intellectual life during the 1650s and 1660s.<sup>1</sup> It would be fair to say that there is general agreement about all of this. Nevertheless, there is still a need to emphasize the point yet further, and especially explain more fully how and why, structurally, the Radical Enlightenment commenced in Holland in the mid-seventeenth century rather than elsewhere in the world, why we need to focus on later Dutch Golden Age when elucidating the origins of the Radical Enlightenment. Attention needs to be drawn especially to the systemic, persistent vulnerability of seventeenth-century Dutch oligarchic republicanism, the system of governance and framework of liberties forged and presided over by Oldenbarnevelt, De Witt and the Holland town regents.

Radical Enlightenment is defined here as an intellectual tendency combining two fundamental components: rejection of religious authority from law, politics, and education, on the one hand, together with democratizing republican social and political programs, on the other. Specifically, this combination of elements

reflects the radical tendency's consistent ideological core through the long eighteenth-century down to the revolutionary era (1775–1848). It was this combination of elements that provided the thread of philosophical continuity linking the successive stages, from the 1650s to the 1848 revolutions.<sup>2</sup>

Politically, down to the revolutionary era of the late eighteenth century, the Dutch provinces and cities remained markedly less stable than the Swiss patrician republics of Berne, Zurich, and Geneva, or the Italian aristocratic republics of Venice and Genoa. It is especially important to consider the implications of the four great Dutch political crises of 1618–19 (Maurits versus Oldenbarnevelt), of 1650 (Willem II versus Amsterdam) and 1672 (Willem III versus the “True Freedom” oligarchs)—as well as, in a later context, of the Dutch political crisis of 1747–8—for creating a practical political as well as theoretical context in which “mixed government” headed by a semi-monarchical figure—already a particular object of Van den Enden's scorn in 1665—was locked in deep, recurring, and irresolvable conflict with a republicanism too oligarchic and narrowly based easily to survive intact. The republicanism of the regents, De Witt's “True Freedom,” was never anything other than a weak and insecure edifice of liberty and toleration because it was too narrowly based ever to receive wide support: it was and was seen to be—especially by Van den Enden, Koerbagh, the Brothers De la Court, and Spinoza—insufficiently broadly based and insufficiently “democratic” to use Spinoza's term. In each of these four great political crises, the regent oligarchy was overwhelmed for longer or shorter intervals by a formidable opposing alliance. This was the combination of a powerful and ambitious prince working together with a public church rallying the lower orders behind them against the regent oligarchy striving to uphold toleration and individual liberty. Thus the “True Freedom” was trapped in conflict with a large body of theologians who joined with the Stadholder and common people during each successive bout of struggle chiefly by mobilizing an intolerant and authoritarian confessional orthodoxy. Theology, in other words, pressed together with the monarchical principle to squeeze the “True Freedom” championed by De Witt.

The *cercle spinoziste* needed a fundamentally new strategy for defending the Republic and this need was directly linked to their fascination with the power of theology and the challenge of trying to weaken that power. According to Spinoza, dread is the cause of “superstition,” which means that everybody is prone to it. But from this it also follows, he argues in the Preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, that by itself “superstition” is highly unstable and changeable and cannot easily be hitched to the needs of a sovereign ruler or a durable church without elaborate ceremonies and doctrines, the underpinning and façade, to

give it institutional stability. "This is because such instability does not spring from reason but from passion alone, in fact from the most powerful of the passions. Therefore it is easy for people to be captivated by a superstition, but difficult to ensure that they remain loyal to it."<sup>3</sup> Samuel Shirley's rendering here makes it difficult for the reader to grasp that by this Spinoza means it is difficult to get people to remain steadfastly within the same system of belief.<sup>4</sup> The Latin original text, "*Quam itaque facile est, ut homines quovis superstitionis genere capiantur, tam difficile contra est efficere, ut in uno, eodemque perstent*" [G III 6], makes it perfectly clear, though, that Spinoza is speaking here of the difficulty of getting men to remain attached to the same system of belief, which to him is "superstition." Left to themselves the common people would never adhere to a "superstition" for very long, but rather constantly be searching on all sides for new forms of credulity. Such instability is highly dangerous and continually causes revolts and upheavals. Hence, up to a point, a stabilized, institutionalized system of "superstition" achieved by the immense efforts everywhere made to adorn religion "whether true or false with pomp and ceremony so that everyone would find it more impressive than anything else and observe it zealously with the highest degree of fidelity"<sup>5</sup> is decidedly better as regards political and social stability. Nevertheless, stability built on such institutionalized "superstition" involves, Spinoza shows, great disadvantages for society too.

The Turks, Spinoza, suggests, have been particularly successful in stabilizing "superstition," to such an extent indeed that they believe "that it is wicked even to argue about religion" and fill everyone's mind with "so many prejudices that they leave no room for sound reason, let alone doubt." One cannot do better by way of stabilizing society than the Ottoman Empire and there is certainly no more effective way to entrench the power of a sovereign ruler than by closely associating him with such institutionalized "superstition." To Spinoza, this is a determining fact of politics.

It may indeed be the highest secret of monarchical government and utterly essential to it, to keep men deceived, and to disguise the fear that sways them with the specious name of religion, so that they will fight for their servitude as if they were fighting for their own deliverance, and will not think it humiliating but supremely glorious to spill their blood and sacrifice their lives for the glorification of a single man.<sup>6</sup>

By "slavery" or "servitude" Spinoza here means a condition where citizens are obliged to submit to a sovereign's commands but where these do not promote the "common good" but rather the ruler's own advantage.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, escaping



from political bondage in Spinoza is closely related to the individual's struggle to escape from moral bondage, through developing one's reasoning powers and resisting the passions, and both forms of escape are far harder for the prejudiced, superstitious, and credulous to achieve than for the rational minded; indeed, for the superstitious, true citizenship is effectively impossible.<sup>8</sup> Spinoza's concept of citizenship is thus simultaneously pivotal to his political theory and his general philosophy. Democracy is the only form of state where philosophy as well as freedom to philosophize can flourish.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, in a free republic defined as one where the free judgment of the individual is not in fact shackled "with prejudices or constraints of any kind," nothing could be more detrimental than the flourishing of the well-adorned and more stable variety of credulity and "superstition." So while institutionalizing and stabilizing "superstition" is the key to establishing a stable monarchy, in a free republic nothing matters more than preventing laws, constraints, and penalties attached to belief and doctrines which by definition are always "prejudices," deflecting coercive dogma of whatever kind, from gaining the force of law.<sup>10</sup>

If one seeks to change a despotic, authoritarian regime into a better one, contends Spinoza, the first priority, and an absolute *sine qua non*, is to defeat credulity and "superstition." So essential is defeating credulity and "superstition" in Spinoza's philosophy that if one cannot weaken "superstition" and ecclesiastical authority, then there is no point in even attempting to overthrow tyranny.<sup>11</sup> One sees then, given this Spinozist framework, that there is nothing at all forced or artificial about postulating as a fundamental and defining feature of the Radical Enlightenment its tying its assault on ecclesiastical power to a wider propensity to social and political subversion. Moreover, monarchy in this political theory is inherently tyrannical unless heavily circumscribed with constitutional limitations. Spinoza admires the Aragonese Revolt against Philip II and detests Philip's monarchy in its Castilian format. Rather than speak of his "distrust," it is better to say that Spinoza harbored a deep dislike of and antagonism toward monarchy.<sup>12</sup>

It is also in the *Theological-Political Treatise's* preface that Spinoza launches into his famous eulogy of the Dutch Republic. Spinoza here is contrasting free republics specifically with "monarchy" and not "tyranny" and this stands out as a fundamental principle of his thought. Consequently, it is unfortunate that Shirley's version mistranslates the key lines, rendering "the highest secret of monarchical government" as "the supreme mystery of despotism, its prop and stay." (The Silverthorne-Israel rendering here also needs, and has been given, some adjustment.) This is a serious double mistranslation since there

is no reference to “mystery” or “tyranny” here: what Spinoza is referring to is the ecclesiastical technique or means of controlling the monarch’s subjects. “*Verum enimvero si regiminis Monarchici summum sit arcanum, ejusque omnino intersit, homines deceptos habere, et metum, quo retineri debent, specioso religionis nomine adumbrare, ut pro servitio, tanquam pro salute pungent*” [G III 7]<sup>13</sup> should be translated: “If, indeed it is the highest secret of the monarchical form of government, and utterly basic to it, to keep men deceived and represent the fear by which they should be held back under the specious name of religion so that they fight for their servitude as if for their salvation.” Pina Totaro correctly translates the main phrase into Italian as “il più grande segreto del regime monarchico.”<sup>14</sup> We must here avoid employing such misleading terms as “mystery” and “tyranny” because such wording altogether obscures what Spinoza is saying, namely, that monarchy is always inherently defective but that it is consistently and efficiently despotic only and exclusively when in firm alliance with organized religion.

A crucial component of this fundamental alliance between monarchy and organized religion, the key to understanding the functioning of monarchy, were the revenues and authority of the Church and the careers these provided. Whatever the merits of Christianity per se, because its offices were lucrative and its pastors regarded by the common people as great dignitaries, “those who came forward to fill the sacred offices were consequently the worst kind of people and the impulse to spread God’s religion degenerated into sordid greed and ambition.”<sup>15</sup> Spinoza, who has considerable respect for the pure pre-Apostolic Christianity offered by Christ, has none at all for the Christianity of the Apostles and those who came after the Apostles. “Unsurprisingly, then, nothing remains of the religion of the early Church except its external ritual (by which the common people seem to adulate rather than venerate God) and faith amounts to nothing more than credulity and prejudices [*quam credulitas et praejudicia*].”<sup>16</sup> This amounted to a sustained and vehement attack on Protestantism, Catholicism, and the Orthodox Church all at once, a program for which Spinoza could expect sympathy and support from his several Collegiant and Socinian as well as his freethinking friends. His harshness here, emotionally powered no doubt by the horrific religious persecution to which many members of his own family had been subjected in southern Portugal, extends to his saying: “And what prejudices they are! [*At quae praejudicia!*] They turn rational men into brutes since they completely prevent each person from using his own free judgment and distinguishing truth from falsehood. They seem purposely designed altogether to extinguish the light of the intellect.”<sup>17</sup> Again Shirley’s rendering notably

weakens and obscures the meaning by translating “*credulitas et praejudicia*” as “credulity and biased dogma” and, worse, “*At quae praejudicia*” as “But what dogma!”<sup>18</sup> Spinoza’s target is not just “dogma” but all religious authority. When Spinoza speaks of “*scripturam sine praejudicio interpretari*,” he does not mean the interpretation of Scripture in a manner free of dogma, but, rather, free of all theological notions.<sup>19</sup>

The alliance between monarchy and religious authority is the chief basis of despotism, as Spinoza analyzes it. At the same time, an important component in the edifice of religious authority, he argues, and one fundamental to the “mysteries” he decries, are “the speculations of the Aristotelians and Platonists” [*Aristotelicorum et Platoniorum speculationes*] [G III 9].<sup>20</sup> He accuses the theologians of having built their theology in considerable part on the constructs of Greek dualist philosophy and rendered the prophetic writings of the Old Testament entirely nonsensical by interpreting them in light of Aristotelian and Platonist concepts.<sup>21</sup> It is far from surprising that the theologians have failed to add anything novel “on any philosophical question,” other than what had long been commonplace in ancient philosophy. “For if you ask what mysteries they discover hidden in Scripture, you will find nothing but the fabrications of Aristotle or Plato or some like philosopher which mostly could be more readily dreamt up by some layman than derived from Scripture by even the most consummate scholar.”<sup>22</sup> This sustained polemic against Plato and Aristotle runs right through Spinoza’s oeuvre.<sup>23</sup>

In the concluding chapter of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, Spinoza reminds us that the subjugation of individual judgment by higher authority can never be complete but it can stretch very far and become systematically “violent” and oppressive. Insofar as such subjugation of judgment is to be “considered possible, it would be most likely under a monarchical government and least probable under a democratic one where all the people, or a large part of them, hold power collectively.” Shortly after this follows Spinoza’s famous line: “*Finis ergo Reipublicae revera libertas est*” [G III 241].<sup>24</sup> It is hardly open to question that Spinoza is arguing strongly in favor of the democratizing republic against monarchical government and that this is the core of his republican creed especially in the period before the Anglo-French assault on the Dutch Republic and the consequent Orangist coup of 1672. It is true that his perspective is somewhat modified in the later *Tractatus Politicus*. But in both works he sets out a conception of republican citizenship that represents a political philosophy dramatically and fundamentally different from that of Hobbes and Locke.<sup>25</sup>

Spinoza has two connected main aims in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, he explains in his preface: to emancipate philosophy from being shackled and “enslaved” to theology and to priesthoods, and to help free men from lay despotism and tyrannical potentates, in other words from all political authorities using divine sanction, priestly sanction, and revelation to buttress the laws and compel men to bow down before their appointed religious spokesmen and institutions, the social and educational values priesthoods proclaim. Accordingly, in Spinoza’s philosophy, linking democratic republicanism to rejecting religious authority philosophically is the basic strategy from the outset. This feature of Spinoza’s thought that so decisively sets his political thought apart from that of Hobbes, Locke, and all other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century political writers likewise typified the outlook of the *cercle spinoziste* as a whole. When seeking an historical-philosophical explanation for this unique group phenomenon we should, therefore, undoubtedly take into account the peculiarity and uniqueness of the political and religious circumstances of the prosperous and successful but politically precarious Dutch Republic during the First Stadholderless period (1650–72). Its specific circumstances provided the specific setting in which this complex new phenomenon could germinate and take shape.

Although there is a considerable measure of agreement among those working on Spinoza’s circle from the 1650s to the 1670s about the general character, aims, and philosophical concerns of the group, not much of this has so far rubbed off on the more general discussion about the European and trans-Atlantic Enlightenment as such. Recent writers on the Enlightenment proceed, just as before, without attributing any importance to the circle and mostly without mentioning them. This is true not only of British and American scholars like Anthony Pagden and Matthew Stewart but even of Dutch writers such as Rienk Vermij, who in his recent work *De Geest uit de fles: De Verlichting en het verval van de confessionele samenleving*<sup>26</sup> makes no mention of Franciscus van den Enden, the Koerbaghs, Lodewijk Meyer, Abraham Cuffeler, and the others, even in his index. In British and American work on Spinoza since the start of the new millennium there has been an increased willingness to accept, or at least consider, the idea of Spinoza as a central figure in the Western Enlightenment and a revolutionary force, and there has even been an occasional reference to his connection with—and this kind of Enlightenment’s rootedness in—“certain dissident factions in the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic,” as one scholar put it, but, again, we usually encounter no mention of Van den Enden, the Koerbaghs, Meyer, Cuffeler, and the others, whether individually or as an active long-standing network.<sup>27</sup>

The *cercle spinoziste* was a network forged by political and social crisis from which a common pool of ideas emerged. They were not a study circle simply imbibing the ideas of Spinoza, but a questioning, reforming, subversive creative network active in many spheres of study and the arts. Michiel Wielema has pointed out that Adriaan Koerbagh developed “some Spinozistic notions before they had been published by Spinoza himself” and that at no stage was he simply replicating Spinoza’s ideas; rather, Koerbagh showed considerable originality, and when attacking religious authority he expressed views “certainly far more outspokenly anti-Christian than anything Spinoza ever dared to write.”<sup>28</sup> Much the same is true of Van den Enden, who was actually the first to couple the attack on religious authority with an uncompromising democratic republicanism irrespective of whether or not he did foreshadow Spinoza’s one-substance philosophical monism. Van den Enden was undoubtedly the precursor of the whole group when it came to openly calling for democracy and in propagating in print the crucial principle that enlightenment and educating the people against “superstition” is the only way to combat political and religious tyranny functioning together, the central principle Spinoza enunciates in the Preface to his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.<sup>29</sup>

Van den Enden was likewise the first to insist that any society aiming to encourage everyone to improve their attitude and outlook and conquer ignorance, fanaticism, and “superstition” has to be politically reorganized and can only arise on the basis of democracy allied to republicanism. Democracy, eulogized by Van den Enden as that form of government which is hardest and least likely to be captured by private interest in conflict with the “common good,”<sup>30</sup> is here heavily suffused with an uncompromising anti-Orangist politics and an even greater hostility to ecclesiastical supervision of morality, society, and education. Toleration that is full and comprehensive, and respects the views of everyone equally, must be fostered and taught, while the religious authority that perennially opposes it must be unbendingly fought and overcome. Real toleration is not a principle that can simply be declared and safeguarded on the basis of existing institutions; rather, it is a precious social benefit that runs directly against the interests of the entire ecclesiastical, aristocratic, and monarchical establishment, and it must be doggedly fought for.

The heavy stress on equality of status, the equal right of everyone to pursue happiness in their own way, and on individual freedom of expression as a precondition for a flourishing democratic republic in Van den Enden, Koerbagh, the De la Courts, and Spinoza, along with the idea that the successful democratic republic is impossible without a degree of mass enlightenment that

overthrows the ubiquitous hegemony of *praejudicia* and that enables men to correctly cultivate body and soul together, leads directly to the question of equal and universal human “rights.” Neither Spinoza, nor Van den Enden, nor the others speak of “rights”; what they do instead is continually insist on advancing what Van den Enden calls the “common” [*alghemeene*] “best” or “interest” [*welstant*], which is presented as the only secure way to advance the individual’s “particular” [*byzondere*] “best” or “interest” [*welstant*].<sup>31</sup> Like Spinoza, Van den Enden is strongly infused with the idea of the particular or individual *welstand* consisting in each pursuing their happiness in their own way, as seems best to them, and that the pursuit of individual happiness is the inevitable goal of everyone, and something chiefly protected and furthered by government when the latter is genuinely committed to the common or general interest. It is this deeply un-Hobbesian and un-Lockean specifically Spinozistic emphasis on the equal necessity and right of everyone to pursue their individual happiness in the best way available, I would argue, and not the older, more deeply rooted theories of “rights” prevailing in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century and infusing Natural Law doctrines, which constitutes the true origin of the equal and universal “rights” that first explicitly appear on the scene in the early 1770s with the *Histoire philosophique* (1770), the political books of Baron d’Holbach and Claude Adrien Helvétius, and later, by 1776, with the texts of Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, George Mason, Thomas Young, Ethan Allen, and other democratic republicans in the American colonies.

In his resolute critique of the Radical Enlightenment thesis, Theo Verbeek focuses on the relation between “naturalism” (“atheism”) or, even further back, “scientific” or “critical” thinking, on the one hand, and “natural rights” on the other. But he definitely appears to confuse “universal and equal human rights” based on the individual pursuit of “happiness” with the ideas of the Natural Law school and the philosophy of John Locke. It is a basic category mistake to confuse modern human rights with Natural Law theories and Locke’s system. The idea that once we decide to “think for ourselves,” as Verbeek argues, we also affirm natural rights or, inversely, that to affirm natural rights we should have a monist or naturalist philosophy is philosophically and historically naive. Natural rights are not innate ideas but must be constructed. They were first constructed (on the model of the notion of property) in late medieval theology and philosophy, the theory being further developed by Spanish Scholastics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—a context which is anything but atheist or naturalist. They were reform-related, partly on theological foundations, by Grotius (1583–1645), and developed into a full and comprehensive theory by

Locke, whose theory in turn inspired the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (1789).<sup>32</sup>

Verbeek appreciates that Spinoza “consciously rejects contemporary foundations or theories of natural right,”<sup>33</sup> but, making exactly the same mistake as Beth Lord, he fails to see that it is precisely natural inequality in the state of nature, and the resulting great inequality in human well-being, that renders it essential to construct a political framework of equality in the free republic.<sup>34</sup> It is precisely the Spinozist denial that God is a lawgiver, that there is no natural right in nature, that makes it imperative to construct both our ethics and “the individual interest” on the basis of a socially constructed system of “good” and “evil” that has no basis in either nature or theology. It is because Spinoza reduces “natural rights” outside the state, in the state of nature, to a brutal chaos where ruthless and powerfully built men have more rights than women, children, and old men, that under “the state” the collective power of individuals can create a “right” which must now be as nearly as possible equalized (something conceivable only in his democratic republic). It is because there are no natural rights prior to society that that form of state that most effectively equalizes the individual pursuit of freedom and happiness, namely, democracy, is the sole means available to construct a social and ethical system of law and “natural right” based on equality.

Exactly this “rights” logic was adopted later by d’Holbach in the 1770s when he argued in his series of four books of political theory that the fundamental inequality of man in the state of nature is what renders equal “natural” rights necessary in a society that seeks to protect the rights of its citizens. For this reason, historians need to reject more emphatically than they have the view that Spinoza was not a forefather of “modern liberalism” because he failed to accord an “absolute worth” to the individual.<sup>35</sup> The correct formulation is that it was Spinoza’s appreciation of man’s natural inequality that led directly to the pressing need to impose a system of individual equality lending the laws authority and enabling men to derive maximum benefit from society and which is, paradoxically, a “natural” remedy to natural inequality.

The Dutch Republic is the essential context for understanding the Radical Enlightenment’s beginnings, but it ceased to be central to the story after the Treaty of Utrecht (1713). Linking the broadest possible attack on religious authority to democratic republican political theory nevertheless remained the Radical Enlightenment’s most essential defining feature, most notably during the French Revolution. Tying the attack on religious authority closely to democratic republicanism is characteristic of the Marquis de Condorcet, Joseph-Antoine



Cérutti, Camille Desmoulins, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, and all the theorists and publicists of the democratic republican wing of the French Revolution, as well as of the Paineite tradition infusing the radical (democratic) wing of the American Revolution—represented in the United States by Thomas Young, Ethan Allen, Joel Barlow, Philip Freneau, Joseph Palmer, and Thomas Jefferson himself. While the centrality of this linkage has indeed been denied by several notable critics of the Radical Enlightenment thesis such as Siep Stuurman, Ann Thomson, and Helena Rosenblatt, who all contend that there is no “necessary” connection between the push for equality and denial of religious authority, such rejectionism hardly seems a tenable or logical position. Rather, the opposite of their view is obviously far more convincing. Contrary to what they maintain, it should be more or less obvious that only through denying divine governance of human affairs, and ruling out revelation and miracles, could the moral and legal order, and hence the social system, be conceived as being not God-given and legitimately sanctioned and ordained by any ecclesiastical authority.

Equally, only by ruling out a conscious divine providence could one block philosophies embracing Locke’s “supra rationem.” Far from being a connection hard to sustain as these critics contend, in reality there is no other way to construct a full equality of interest and opinions in society. Only by systematically excluding revelation and theological doctrines, in every dimension of legal, educational, and political life, leaving reason and social utility to be the sole criteria of legitimacy in the social sphere, can a divinely sanctioned world order buttressing value systems and according priority of interest and opinions to the royal, aristocratic, ecclesiastical, and oligarchic, based on priestly sanction and support, be set wholly aside. Awareness of just how momentous and great a break this represented infused the Radical Enlightenment itself from its first stirrings in the 1650s down to its final defeat during and after the 1848 revolutions. Eliminating Aristotelianism, Platonism, and the “supra rationem,” indeed every conceivable ground for reconciliation between theology and philosophy and doing so uncompromisingly, a step later vigorously followed up by John Toland in the wake of Spinoza, specifically to counter Locke,<sup>36</sup> was the sole and exclusive strategy capable of establishing anything resembling a comprehensive equality of interests, participation, expression, and representation in society and politics.

The Radical Enlightenment’s linkage of democratic republicanism with eliminating religious authority, then, is simultaneously an undeniable historical fact, in that the democratic republicans of the American and French Revolutions, with Condorcet and Paine at their head, like their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century predecessors, were mostly atheists, if not radical deists (or, otherwise,



radical Unitarians, in the tradition of Jarig Jelles, Jan Rieuwertsz, John Jebb, Richard Price, and Joseph Priestley), and a crucial, indispensable, well-defined philosophical procedure. The uncompromising rejection of theology and priesthood was indeed, as Spinoza argued, the requisite and absolute *sine qua non* for a secular and naturalistic politics and social theory. What has aptly been called the “radicalization of the freedom to philosophize” by Spinoza was doubtless in one sense an outcome of the Cartesian philosophy; but it was ultimately a consequence of an uncompromising separation of philosophy and theology that enabled Spinoza and his circle to integrate the social and political dimensions of their thought to their naturalistic metaphysics in a revolutionary new manner.

In Spinoza, as Vicente Serrano recently expressed it, “knowledge is not a mere operation isolated from the rest of the life of individuals, but it is rather the life of individuals and their very will.”<sup>37</sup> Radical Enlightenment is about revolutionizing all philosophy, politics, society, morality, and education by decisively and irrevocably changing the relationship between the individual and authority, between learning and “ignorance,” and between theologians and social reality.

## Notes

- 1 Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 581–587, 889–931.
- 2 Jonathan Israel, “Radical Enlightenment’: A game-changing concept,” in *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment*, ed. Steffen Ducheyne (New York: Routledge, 2017).
- 3 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ed. Jonathan Israel, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5 [TTP, pref., §§7–8]. [References to Spinoza’s TTP are given here by page number following Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*. References are also given to Curley’s edition in brackets.]
- 4 “So men’s readiness to fall victim to any kind of superstition makes it correspondingly difficult to persuade them to adhere to one and the same kind.” See Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Gebhardt edition, 1925), trans. Samuel Shirley (Brill: Leiden, 1989), 50.
- 5 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 5 [TTP, pref., §9].
- 6 Ibid., 6 [TTP, pref., §10].
- 7 See Susan James, *Spinoza on Philosophy, Politics and Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 255.
- 8 See Michael LeBuffe, *From Bondage to Freedom: Spinoza on Human Excellence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 182–189.

- 9 James, *Spinoza on Philosophy*, 235, 253.
- 10 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 6 [TTP, pref., §10].
- 11 Ibid., 3–12 [TTP, pref.].
- 12 Cf. R. J. McShea, *The Political Philosophy of Spinoza* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 116.
- 13 TTP, pref., §10.
- 14 Spinoza, *Trattato teologico-politico*, ed. Pina Totaro (Naples: Bibliopolis, 2007), 9.
- 15 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 7 [TTP, pref., §15].
- 16 Ibid., 7 [TTP, pref., §16].
- 17 Ibid., 7–8 [TTP, pref., §16].
- 18 Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* [Shirley], 52–53. See also Emilia Giancotti Boscherini, *Lexicon Spinozanum*, 2 vols (The Hague: Springer, 1970), vol. 2, 858–860.
- 19 See, in particular, Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, ch. 7.
- 20 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 8 [TTP, pref., §18].
- 21 Cf. Ibid., 8, 173 [TTP, pref., §18 and TTP, ch. xiii, §5].
- 22 Ibid., 173 [TTP, ch. xiii, §5].
- 23 See Wim Klever, *Spinoza Classicus: Antieke bronnen van een modern denker* (Budel: Damon, 2005), 79–92.
- 24 Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, 252 [TTP, ch. xx, §12].
- 25 Christophe Miqueu adopts a similar perspective with respect to Hobbes but aligns Locke and Spinoza more closely than is implied here. See Christophe Miqueu, *Spinoza, Locke, et l'idée de citoyenneté: Une génération républicaine à l'aube des Lumières* (Paris: Garnier Classique, 2012), 54.
- 26 Rienk Vermij, *De Geest uit de fles: De Verlichting en het verval van de confessionele samenleving* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Nieuwezijds, 2014).
- 27 See Christopher Norris, “Spinoza and the Conflict of Interpretations,” in *Spinoza Now*, ed. Dimitris Vardoulakis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 27 and in the same volume, Michael Mack, “Toward an Inclusive Universalism: Spinoza's Ethics of Sustainability,” *Spinoza Now*, 103 and Warren Montag, “Interjecting Empty Spaces: Imagination and Interpretation in Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*,” *Spinoza Now*, 161–164.
- 28 Michiel Wielema, *The March of the Libertines. Spinozists and the Dutch Reformed Church (1660–1750)* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2004), 15, 85; see also Miqueu, *Spinoza, Locke, et l'idée*, 53–72.
- 29 Franciscus van Den Enden, *Free Political Propositions and Considerations of State* [1665], edited and translated by Wim Klever (Vrijstad, 2007), 191, 194.
- 30 Ibid., 156–160; Miqueu, *Spinoza, Locke, et l'idée*, 60–62.
- 31 See Franciscus van Den Enden, *Vrije Politieke stellingen en Consideratien van staat* [1665], ed. Wim Klever (Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 1992), 169–173; Wim

- Klever, "A New Source of Spinozism: Franciscus van den Enden," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29, no. 4 (1991): 613–631, here 627.
- 32 Cf. Theo Verbeek, "Spinoza on Natural Rights," *Intellectual History Review* 17, no. 3 (2007): 257–275, here 289.
- 33 Verbeek, "Spinoza on Natural Rights," 264–265; Theo Verbeek, "Liberté, vertu, démocratie," in *Qu'est-ce que les Lumières "Radicales": Libertinage, athéisme et spinozisme dans le tournant philosophique de l'âge classique*, ed. Laurent Bove, Tristan Dagron, and Catherine Secrétan (Paris: Éditions d'Amsterdam, 2007), 366, 368.
- 34 Beth Lord, "Spinoza on Natural Inequality and the Fiction of Moral Equality," in *Reassessing the Radical Enlightenment*, here esp. 127–129, 138–139.
- 35 Henri Krop, *Spinoza: Een paradoxale icoon van Nederland* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Prometheus, 2014), 744; see also Wiep van Bunge, "The Modernity of the Radical Enlightenment," *De Achttiende Eeuw* 41 (2009): 137–143, here 140–141.
- 36 Ian Leask, "The Undivulged Event in Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious*," in *Atheism and Deism Revalued: Heterodox Religious Identities in Britain, 1650–1800*, ed. Wayne Hudson, Diego Lucci, and J. R. Wigelsworth (Farham: Ashgate, 2014), 63–80.
- 37 Vicente Serrano, "Freedom of Thought as Radical Freedom in Spinoza's Critique of Religion," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 14, no. 1 (2012): 23–39, here 27.

# A Response: Spinoza's Paradoxical Radicalism

Charles Ramond

On the opening page of his contribution, Jonathan Israel defines the “Radical Enlightenment” as “an intellectual tendency combining two fundamental components: rejection of religious authority from law, politics, and education, on the one hand, together with democratizing republican social and political programs, on the other.” From this point of view, Israel characterizes Spinoza’s philosophy, in the framework of the *cercle spinoziste*, as “subversive”<sup>1</sup> and even “revolutionary.”<sup>2</sup> Of course, for each of us today, just as for preceding centuries, Spinoza’s philosophy has something “subversive” or “revolutionary” to it—and this is why historically this philosophy has been so loved or so hated. However, it seems to me that the radical dimension of Spinoza’s philosophy can be seen as distinct from his “rejection of religious authority from law, politics, and education,” and the concomitant “democratizing of republican social and political programs.” The thesis I will defend here, in effect, is that the “radical” dimension of Spinoza’s philosophy is rather tied up with the “conservative” and “relativistic” features of his philosophy than with its “subversive” or “revolutionary” features: and this is why I think we can correctly speak of Spinoza’s “paradoxical” radicalism.<sup>3</sup>

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Describing Spinoza’s political thought as subversive obliges us, it seems to me, to ask why Spinoza so consistently and so vigorously denigrates the very idea of “subversion,” or what he usually refers to as acts of “rebellion” [*seditio, rebellio*], “obstinacy” or “stubbornness” [*contumacia*], and “disobedience” [*inobedientia*]. The references are innumerable, and all point in the same direction. Indeed, Spinoza reserves a particularly negative judgment for “rebellions,” as many quite explicit passages from the *Political Treatise* show.<sup>4</sup> The most striking and

significant of these is the passage where Spinoza discusses “Hannibal’s virtue.” There, Spinoza notes that “it is rightly credited to Hannibal’s exceptional virtue that there was never any rebellion in his army” [*merito eximiae virtuti ducitur quod in ipsius exercitu nulla unquam seditio orta fuerit*].<sup>5</sup> “Rebellion” [*seditio*] appears, therefore, to be the very contrary of what political virtue permits.

The word *contumacia*—“obstinacy” or “stubbornness” (in Edwin Curley’s translation), or, again, “insubmission”—appears in the last lines of the Preface to the *Theological-Political Treatise*, carrying with it a solemnly negative connotation: “And I know,” writes Spinoza, “finally, that what the common people call constancy is obstinacy [*novi denique constantiam vulgi contumaciam esse*]. It’s not governed by reason, but carried away by an impulse to praise or to blame. I don’t ask the common people [*vulgus*] to read these things, nor anyone else who is struggling with the same affects as the common people.”<sup>6</sup> The “obstinate” reader is asked to close the book. “Obstinacy” is meant to designate that which is worst in collective human behavior,<sup>7</sup> just like “disobedience” characterizes that which is worst in individual human behavior. Evoking the myth of Nero’s murder of his mother, Agrippina the Younger, Spinoza writes in Ep. 23 to Blyenbergh that “What then was Nero’s knavery? Nothing but this: he showed by that act that he was ungrateful, without compassion, and *disobedient* [*inobediens*].”<sup>8</sup>

The contemporary reader is likely to be surprised to find the qualifier “disobedient” [*inobediens*] following “ungrateful” and “without compassion,” and, as it were, surpassing them in the hierarchy of horror (it is the ultimate adjective in the sentence, and with it ends the sentence.) It is in effect hard to understand why “disobedience,” perhaps a venial sin (when it is not praised), would be invoked to characterize the odious nature of an act to this degree so odious. But still, the fact is there: whether we want to accept it or not, Spinoza considers “disobedience” to be the worst thing about Nero’s matricide.

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This critique of “disobedience” is systematized by the more general thesis of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, an anti-rebellion treatise, according to which the salvation of the ignorant by “obedience” is the central and primary aim of Scripture.

The *Theological-Political Treatise* teaches us that the priests, broadly construed, are interested in sowing discord and provoking *rebellions* [*seditiones*], insofar as revolts weaken state and thereby allow for the priesthood to grow stronger. The mob or crowd [*vulgus*], hysterical, unconscious, blind, easily manipulated, inconstant, and furious, is the agent of such rebellions. The free man at the end

of the *Theological-Political Treatise* is not opposed to political authority per se, but to the rebellious crowd that's been riled up by the priesthood. To provoke a rebellion, it suffices for the priests to proclaim that the sacred texts teach something theoretical—say, about God's nature, or about any other thing for that matter—and that believing in the truth of the revealed, theoretical knowledge is paramount. With this in hand, the state is divided and becomes fragile. In effect, if the common people come to think that their beliefs have a public aspect or civic import, the specialists of holy texts will have greater and greater influence. Certain opinions or beliefs will be held as valid and saintly even, whereas others will be forbidden and cursed. Following the ruination of the freedom of belief, liars, tricksters, hypocrites, and false prophets of all sorts will begin to appear in droves, as will resistance to this form of oppression, and with resistance, discord, quarrels, seditions, divisions, and, finally, the destruction of the state.

Having described the sickness in this way, Spinoza's proposed remedy in the *Theological-Political Treatise*—which, in this sense, is clearly an anti-rebellion treatise—consists in showing that, contrary appearances notwithstanding, Scripture actually teaches nothing with regard to matters of faith, and has only a practical aim or teaching, which consists in inspiring the “true way of life.” Just like the Christ did when protecting the adulterous woman from the crowd of men (“he who is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her”), Spinoza's thesis, *that beliefs have no importance*, intends to disarm the hostile crowd. In effect, if we admit with Spinoza that Scripture teaches nothing about God's nature, nor anything regarding any other speculative matter, therefore opinions and beliefs, all at once, are liberated. The freedom to think what one wants and to say what one thinks, the veritable object of the *Theological-Political Treatise*, becomes effective. The “priests” lose their grip on opinions. There are no longer any sacred or heretical opinions. There is no longer any reason to battle over beliefs, and the state ceases being weakened or divided. The question is not therefore to know what people “believe,” but to know whether they “obey” the sovereign power's orders. Everything is therefore brought back to the question of obedience, such an important question in the *Theological-Political Treatise* that it makes explicit the link between the chapters consecrated to the interpretation of Scripture and the chapters consecrated to the freedom of thought.

The thesis is ceaselessly taken back up in the most explicit fashion: “The purpose of Scripture,” writes Spinoza, “was not to teach the sciences, because [...] it requires nothing from men but obedience [*nihil praeter obedientiam eandem ab hominibus exigere*], and condemns only stubbornness, not ignorance [*solamque contumaciam, non autem ignorantiam damnare*].”<sup>9</sup> The end of

Chapter 13 regroups all beliefs into only two categories of behavior: those which show “obedience,” and those which show “stubbornness” or “insubmission.” This is the supreme criteria, and the condemnation of insubmission is without any equivocation in this particularly remarkable passage:

A person believes something piously only insofar as his opinions move him to obedience, and impiously only insofar as he takes a license from them to sin or rebel [*licentiam ad peccandum aut rebellandum sumit*]. So if anyone becomes stiff-necked by believing truths [*si quis vera credendo fiat contumax*], he is really impious [*impium <habet fidem>*]; on the other hand, if he becomes obedient [*obediens*] by believing falsehoods, he has a pious faith [*pium habet fidem*].<sup>10</sup>

In the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza also identifies disobedience as a form of “sin” against the state, which is to say he views disobedience as a major political fault, as opposed to “obedience,” which he explicitly associates with what is “good,” “right,” and “the common decree”: “Sin [*peccatum*],” writes Spinoza, “[...] is what can’t be done rightly, or [*sive*] what’s prohibited by law. And obedience [*obsequium*] is a constant will to do what by law is good and what the common decree says ought to be done.”<sup>11</sup> “Sin” and “disobedience” are therefore equivalent. This is also true of the only passage in the *Ethics* where Spinoza uses the term “disobedience” [*inobedientia*]. There, once again, “sin” is associated with “disobedience,” whereas “obedience” is held as a “merit”: “Sin, therefore, is nothing but disobedience [*est itaque peccatum nihil aliud, quam inobedientia*],” writes Spinoza, “which for that reason can be punished only by the law of the State. On the other hand, obedience is considered a merit in a Citizen [*et contra obedientia Civi meritum ducitur*], because on that account he is judged worthy of enjoying the advantages of the State.”<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, the *Theological-Political Treatise* cannot be considered as a “subversive” text, in that it would be “anti-religious,” though it has often been held as such. In fact, exactly the opposite is true. The application of his new method of interpretation in the central part of the *Theological-Political Treatise* allows Spinoza to reveal the fundamental, unique, and simple message of Scripture: *obedience to the true way of life is the path to salvation*.<sup>13</sup> With his careful and scrupulous study of a considerable number of passages of Scripture, Spinoza shows, in effect, that just as much as the sacred texts diverge, contradict themselves, or are simply confused on a number of points that concern theoretical matters (i.e., the nature or activity of God), they are likewise in perfect agreement about salvation by obedience. And what could be more logical, since Scripture is addressed to anybody, and therefore everybody? “Everyone, without exception,

can obey [*omnes absolute obedire possunt*]. But only a very few [...] acquire a habit of virtue from the guidance of reason alone.”<sup>14</sup>

The Spinozist method leads in this way to revealing the essentially behaviorist and externalist character of Scripture's teaching. Likewise, in stark contrast with charity, a behavioral and external virtue par excellence, faith and internal virtues are practically entirely effaced from Scripture.<sup>15</sup> Scripture shows therefore that “obedience” to the true way of life is the behavioral and externalist criteria of the value of belief, just like “works” [*opera*] are the criteria of “faith”<sup>16</sup>: “Who does not see,” declares Spinoza, “that each Testament is nothing but a training in obedience? [*Quis enim non videt utrumque Testamentum nihil esse praeter obedientiae disciplinam?*]”<sup>17</sup> Scripture, read attentively, always folds “faith” back onto “obedience”: “The Gospel [...] contains nothing but simple faith: to trust in God, and to revere him, or (what is the same thing) [*sive quod idem est*], to obey him [*Deo obedire*].”<sup>18</sup> And thus, faith, in Scripture, is “not saving by itself, but only in relation to obedience.”<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, the lesson of Scripture is that “faith requires, not so much true doctrines, as pious doctrines, i.e., doctrines which move the heart to obedience.”<sup>20</sup>

Spinoza, thus, does not reveal the factual errors, the confusions, the obscurities, or even the contradictions of Scripture as a means of destroying religion. Rather, quite the contrary: his aim is to show that even if each Testament is bugged by countless obscurities and contradictions from the point of view of speculative or theoretical understanding, nevertheless Scripture does not contain any obscurity with regard to its essential feature, that is to say salvation by obedience to the true way of life. Far from being a critique of religion, the *Theological-Political Treatise* shows that Scripture delivers an irreplaceable message, because it is inaccessible to reason and to philosophy. Like Alexandre Matheron showed in his work *Le Christ et le salut des ignorants*, Spinoza confesses his inability to make sense of how the ignorant can be saved, since such a claim runs against the grain of his own philosophy (that is to say, for him, it would be contrary to reason). Yet, not only does Spinoza, by means of his method of interpretation, show this claim to be present in Scripture itself, but moreover he admits its truth as much as he can, and describes it as a “moral certainty”: “I maintain unconditionally,” writes Spinoza, “that the natural light cannot discover this fundamental tenet of Theology—or at least that no one yet has demonstrated it. So revelation has been most necessary [*revelationem maxime necessariam fuisse*]. Nevertheless, I maintain that we can use our judgment, so that we accept what has already been revealed with at least moral certainty [*morali certitudine*].”<sup>21</sup>



Far from having “drastically demoted theology and religion,” like Richard Popkin claims, having “cast them out of the rational world,”<sup>22</sup> Spinoza, in a sense, humiliates reason in the *Theological-Political Treatise*, forcing it to accept, with a “moral” certainty (though this is only “moral,” a moral certainty is, for Early Modern philosophers, a very high degree of certainty), the need to give way to a “revelation” that it cannot understand, demonstrate, nor even integrate into its own system. Like Feuerbach will later do, Spinoza lowers theology, without a doubt, but only in order to elevate religion. Few philosophers have found so much clarity and power in Scripture’s message. Likewise, few have so clearly shown the necessity of Revelation, giving it such a warm welcome. Theologians who for centuries now have tried to show that Spinoza “was attacking religion,” were only defending their own interests, as is often the case, at the cost of truth, and we do not have any reason to borrow their discourses today.

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Seeing Spinoza as a “subversive” philosopher obligates us, furthermore, to explain why he shows himself so constantly and explicitly conservative in political matters. If we accept that the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza’s last work, is the culmination of his thoughts about political matters, we must also recognize that his ultimate preoccupation was to schematize political regimes that would be as “durable” as possible and that would best resist any potential crisis, upheaval, reversal, or rebellion.

In effect, with the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza’s project is to propose reforms (or models) for monarchic, aristocratic, and democratic regimes that would permit each of these regimes to “last” as long as possible. So, at the beginning of the *Political Treatise*, ch. viii, we read: “So far we’ve discussed the Monarchic State. Now we’ll say how an Aristocratic State should be organized so that it can *last*.”<sup>23</sup> In the *Political Treatise* at least, Spinoza does not aim to propose a history (or, even less, a dialectic) of political regimes. His gesture, rather, is conservative. It consists in trying to build model regimes that would be as long-lasting as a possible, like permanent great structures, each stable in their own way. Chapter 10 shows this very clearly, which acts as a general cross-check after the long developments of the two preceding chapters on aristocratic regimes. Returning to his own model aristocracy, Spinoza asks if it is well-balanced and capable of lasting perennially (which is to ask if it fulfills the basic need of any regime to remain stable), or if there still subsists some “inherent defect” which could cause it to be “dissolved” or “changed into another form.”<sup>24</sup> To measure its strength, Spinoza raises what he takes to be the strongest possible objections against his

proposed model regime. Then, convinced that the regime he proposes would be able to respond victoriously to such “objections,”<sup>25</sup> he concludes the chapter, and with it his remarks on aristocracy, as if in a fit of triumphal pride: “I can assert unconditionally, then [*possum igitur absolute affirmare*],” declares Spinoza, “that both a state which one city alone controls, and especially a state which several cities control, is everlasting [*aeternum esse*], or can’t be dissolved or changed into another form by any internal cause [*sive nulla interna causa posse dissolvi aut in aliam formam mutari*].” Evidently, Spinoza takes great delight (which explains his general carelessness, with respect to the rest of his philosophy, when he describes here the singular thing in question as “eternal”) in the idea that through patience and hard work he has succeeded in his political project with respect to aristocratic regimes.

This political conservatism—Spinoza’s effort to build long-lasting regimes—is, besides, only the result of Spinoza’s broader philosophical valorization of duration.

“Duration” is defined as “an indefinite continuation of existing [*duratio est indefinita existendi continuatio*].”<sup>26</sup> Likewise, the definition of the *conatus* by the “perseverance in being”<sup>27</sup> means that the notions of duration and self-preservation are endowed with universal ontological value. The duration of a singular thing thus becomes the scale for measuring its *conatus*. Absolutely speaking, of course, any singular thing could indefinitely prolong its own existence.<sup>28</sup> But due to the nature of their respective encounters, singular things possessing a more powerful *conatus* than others will last longer than others, the hierarchy of powers being measured according to the hierarchy of durations. In the last lines of the *Ethics*,<sup>29</sup> Spinoza explicitly writes that the wise man, “being by a certain eternal necessity, conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, never ceases to be [*nunquam esse desinit*].” It is not forbidden to take this claim literally, as an affirmation of the indefinite prolongation of the wise man’s existence. Were the wise men of Antiquity not always represented as enjoying a particularly long life? And is the spectacular augmentation of the average human lifespan over the course of recent centuries in developed countries not also the sign of the augmentation of humanity’s power?

This valorization of duration is also to be found in the domain of Spinoza’s theory of understanding. Spinoza makes the possibility of pursuing some line of thought “without interruption” a criteria of its rational value: “When the mind attends to a thought,” Spinoza writes in *the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* at §104 “– to weigh it, and deduce from it, in good order, the things legitimately to be deduced from it—if it is false, the mind will uncover the falsity;

but if it is true, *the mind will continue successfully* [*sin autem vera, tum feliciter perget*], *without any interruption*, to deduce true things from it” (my italics). This property of valid deductions to be able to “continue successfully, without any interruption,” is, by all evidence, one instantiation of the claim that “the truth is the standard both of itself and of the false.”<sup>30</sup> Spinoza already had made a note of this at TIE §44, where he declared that: “To prove the truth and good reasoning, we require no tools except the truth itself and good reasoning. For I have proved, and still strive to prove, good reasoning by good reasoning [*nam bonum ratiocinium bene ratiocinando comprobavi, et adhuc probare conor*].” For Spinoza, therefore, with respect to our understanding and to life in general, perseverance in being is indissociably a criterion of both rationality and power: an indefinite chain of consequences itself attests to the validity of the reasoning, just like, without a doubt, the indefinite prolongation of some life would itself attest to an incomparably great power.

Logically, the same claims are therefore present in Spinoza’s political philosophy. We have seen that Spinoza valorizes the *duration* of political regimes, such as with respect to the durability of the model aristocracy in the *Political Treatise*. From this point of view, the superiority of democracy consists not in its moral superiority, or in the “values” it embodies. Rather, democratic regimes are superior in virtue of the fact that they are particularly stable, much more so than despotic regimes (Spinoza speaks of the “Turks”), insofar as the agreement among the citizenry, inner peace, and stability are constantly renewed within them. For Spinoza, clearly, democracy is not the *imperium absolutum* because it is subversive. Rather, a well-built democratic regime is the *imperium absolutum* because it is the most durable kind of regime, which is to say it is the most stable, the most powerful, the most long-lasting, the most capable of persevering in its being, and of self-preservation. Just as the formalism of the *more geometrico* leads to “human freedom” by means of the power of the understanding, so does the formalism of democratic counting allow for political freedom—and peace. Indeed, since it is always possible to know which opinion receives the greatest number of votes, the law of counting allows for the peaceful resolution of the quasi-totality of all conflicts.

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It was probably inevitable, given the historical context of Early Modernity, that a critique of theology would be mistaken as a critique of religion and that a conservative defense of democracy would be misapprehended as a willful desire to subvert monarchies. If therefore the belief in the subversive or radical

dimension of Spinoza's philosophy happened to depend on some kinds of misunderstandings, these misunderstandings were necessary, and, regardless, as is often the case with respect to error and belief, they have not failed in producing powerful effects.

Nevertheless, a Spinozism of "salvation by obedience" and "perseverance in being" possesses, paradoxically enough, a radical emancipatory force that has maybe not yet produced all of its effects even with respect to actually existent political and social structures. If we admit that all the talk of "values" constantly invoked in our democracies (such as with the motto of the French Republic: "liberté, égalité, fraternité") is but some leftover, in the form of transcendent contemporary morality, of ancient religious transcendence, then the Spinozist conception of democracy, strictly immanent and relativist in its goals to maximize its duration, reveals itself to be a horizon our democracies are far from having reached.

To diminish the power of the theologians, the *Theological-Political Treatise* maintained that beliefs have no importance, and that only behavior and works count in matters of religion. In this sense, the valorization of "obedience" to the true way of life was only the other face of indifference about opinions. This same indifference about opinions is present, in a striking way, in Spinozist democratic politics. In effect, his conception of democracy as an *imperium absolutum* is but the spectacular outcome of Spinoza's entirely quantitative conception of *Natura naturata* or "singular things." "Each thing, as far as it can by its own power [*quantum in se est*], strives to persevere in its being."<sup>31</sup> All reality is a *quantum*. From this point of view, it is easy to understand the Spinoza's enthusiasm for democracy, which is itself nothing but the pure, immanent law of counting. Democracy, when it is "absolute," does not depend on a "value" or preestablished transcendence. Democratic rights are not submitted to a superior morality but depend entirely on elections and on counting. "The power of a state, and hence its *right*, are to be reckoned by the *number* of its citizens," declares Spinoza in the *Political Treatise*,<sup>32</sup> submitting in this way all juridical laws to the exclusively political law of counting. Spinoza may very well be a theoretician of "natural right"; he maintains nevertheless that "justice" and "injustice" cannot precede laws, or transcend them, but that they depend on and derive entirely from the state's existence: "Therefore, like sin and obedience, taken strictly, so also justice and injustice can be conceived only in a state."<sup>33</sup> Justice and injustice themselves no longer possessing any transcendent value, obedience to the law can, paradoxically, become emancipatory: I obey the law because it is the law and not because it is good. There is no sense, besides, in

speaking of “good” or “bad” laws, or “just” and “unjust” laws, because there only exist laws that were “voted” or “non-voted” by a majority. Spinoza thus opens the way to a democracy without values, a democracy that would separate itself from morality, having already been separated from theology. Each one of us can measure the radicality of such positions by looking at the spontaneous resistance that they create in us: so difficult is it to deliver ourselves totally from the taste for transcendence!

## Notes

- 1 Israel writes: “One sees then, given this Spinozist framework, that there is nothing at all forced or artificial about postulating as a fundamental and defining feature of the Radical Enlightenment its tying its assault on ecclesiastical power to a wider propensity to social and political *subversion*.” He then further claims: “The *cercle spinoziste* was a network forged by political and social crisis from which a common pool of ideas emerged. They were not a study circle simply imbibing the ideas of Spinoza, but a questioning, reforming, *subversive* creative network active in many spheres of study and the arts” (our italics for “subversion,” etc.).
- 2 Israel reveals the connection between the Spinoza’s ideas and the “revolutionary era” that begins at the end of the eighteenth century, making numerous references to the French and American Revolutions. He considers Spinoza’s philosophy (as well as the philosophy of Spinoza’s *cercle*) as intrinsically revolutionary: “In British and American work on Spinoza since the start of the new millennium there has been an increased willingness to accept, or at least consider, the idea of Spinoza as a central figure in the Western Enlightenment and a *revolutionary* force”; Again: “It was ultimately a consequence of an uncompromising separation of philosophy and theology that enabled Spinoza and his circle to integrate the social and political dimensions of their thought to their naturalistic metaphysics in a *revolutionary* new manner.” Israel repeats his claim in the last sentence of his paper: “Radical Enlightenment is about *revolutionizing* all philosophy, politics, society, morality, and education by decisively and irrevocably changing the relationship between the individual and authority, between learning and ‘ignorance’, and between theologians and social reality” (our italics for “revolution,” etc.).
- 3 The theses I present here were progressively developed over the course of my other works on Spinoza, from Charles Ramond, *Qualité et quantité dans la philosophie de Spinoza* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995) to Charles Ramond, to *Spinoza contemporain: Philosophie, Éthique, Politique* (Paris: Harmattan, 2016).

In 2002, François Zourabichvili published *Le conservatisme paradoxal de Spinoza: Enfance et royauté* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France). My reading of Spinoza is very different from Zourabichvili's, but the expression "paradoxical conservatism" suits it well.

- 4 See the following passages: TP, ch. v, §2: "For certainly we should impute *rebellions*, wars, and contempt for, or violation of, the laws not so much to the wickedness of the subjects as to the corruption of the state. [...] For a civil order which hasn't eliminated the causes of *rebellions*, where you constantly have to fear war, and where the laws are frequently violated, is not that different from the state of nature, where everyone lives according to his own mentality, his life always in great danger." TP, ch. vii, §12: "As soon as the citizens allow mercenary troops to be engaged—men whose trade is war and whose power is greatest when there is dissension and *rebellion*—they're completely reduced to subjection and lay the foundation for eternal warfare." TP, ch. vii, §13: "This would lead to great inequality among the citizens, and so to envy, constant grumbling, and finally, to rebellions. These would not be unwelcome to Kings eager to be the master." TP, ch. x, §3: "In addition, the authority of the Tribunes against the Patricians was defended by the support of the plebeians. Whenever they called upon the plebeians, they seemed to promote *sedition* rather than convene a Council. These disadvantages have no place in the state we've described in the preceding two Chapters" (our italics).
- 5 TP, ch. v, §3.
- 6 TTP, pref., §33 [G III 12, ll. 13–14].
- 7 So, Moses declares, addressing himself to the Hebrews: "For I know your rebelliousness and your stubbornness [*rebellionem et contumaciam*]. If you have been rebels against God while I lived among you, how much more will you be rebels after my death" [TTP, ch. xvii, §105/G III 219, ll. 25–26].
- 8 Ep. 23 [G IV 147, ll. 8–14]. The Latin reads: "*Quodnam ergo Neronis scelus? Non aliud, quam quod hoc facinore ostenderet se ingratum, immisericordium, ac inobedientem esse.*"
- 9 TTP, ch. xiii, §7 [G III 168, ll. 11–14]. Dan Garber, in his contribution to this volume, underlines the importance of these passages of the TTP for his own reading. I was myself very happy to notice this convergence.
- 10 TTP, ch. xiii, §29 [G III 172, ll. 20–25].
- 11 TP, ch. ii, §19.
- 12 E4p37s2.
- 13 TTP, ch. xiii, title: "That Scripture teaches only the simplest matters, that it aims only at obedience [*Scripturam [...] nec aliud praeter obedientiam intendere*], and teaches nothing about the divine Nature, except what men can imitate by a certain manner of living [*certa vivendi ratione*]."

- 14 TTP, ch. xv, §45 [G III 188, ll. 26–30].
- 15 Cf. TTP, ch. xiii, §22 [G III 171, ll. 15–18]: *Denique Johannis [...] Deum per solam charitatem explicat, concluditque eum revera Deum habere et noscere, qui charitatem habet.*
- 16 TTP, ch. xiii, §29 [G III 172, ll. 18–19]: “So we must not for a moment believe that opinions [*opiniones*], considered in themselves and *without regard to works* [*absque respectu ad opera*], have any piety or impiety in them” (my italics).
- 17 TTP, ch. xiv, §6 [G III 174, ll. 9–11].
- 18 TTP, ch. xiv, §8 [G III 174, ll. 17–19].
- 19 TTP, ch. xiv, §14 [G III 175, ll. 18–19]: *Fidem non per se, sed tantum ratione obedientiae salutiferam esse.* The entire following passage insists on the central role of obedience for “faith” and for “works.”
- 20 TTP, ch. xiv, §20 [G III 176 ll. 18–19]: *Sequitur denique fidem non tam requirere vera quam pia dogmata, hoc est, talia, quae animum ad obedientiam movent.*
- 21 TTP, ch. xv, §27 [G III 185, ll. 23–28].
- 22 Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism, from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 325.
- 23 TP, ch. viii, §1: “*Huc usque de imperio monarchico. Qua autem ratione aristocraticum instituendum sit, ut permanere possit, hic jam dicemus*” [my boldface].
- 24 TP, ch. x, §1, beginning.
- 25 TP, ch. x, §10: “But here’s another objection someone might make [*At objici nobis adhuc potest*], ” and, later, “To reply to this Objection, I say first [*sed ut huic objectioni respondeam, dico primo*].”
- 26 E2d5.
- 27 E3p6: “Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being [*Unaquaeque res, quantum in se est, in suo esse perseverare conatur*].”
- 28 E3p8.
- 29 E5p42s.
- 30 E2p43s.
- 31 E3p6.
- 32 TP, ch. vii, §18: “*Nam imperii potentia et consequenter jus ex civium numero aestimanda est.*”
- 33 TP, ch. ii, §23: “*Ut itaque peccatum et obsequium stricte sumptum, sic etiam justitia et injustitia non nisi in imperio possunt concipi.*”

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