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More Recent Idealist Readings of Spinoza

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss a once dominant tradition of Spinoza interpretation that shows signs of renewal: Spinoza as a kind of idealist. According to this interpretation, the attribute of thought is the most fundamental attribute in Spinoza's system and the existence of finite modes is in some way illusory. Its proponents include a contemporary scholar, Michael Della Rocca, as well as several late 19th century British scholars: John Caird, Harold Joachim, James Martineau, and Frederick Pollock. In this paper, I explore their arguments, criticisms, and conclusions.

1. Introduction

Rigorous studies of Spinoza's philosophy by dedicated experts are now abundant and widely available. This is a relatively recent development in the history of Spinoza studies. For the first two centuries after his death, Spinoza's reputation was so embroiled in intellectual and cultural controversies that careful, scholarly analyses of his texts and views were virtually non-existent.[1] The first serious critical edition of his texts didn't appear until the 1880s, when Spinoza's lightning rod status had finally begun to wane and scholars began examining Spinoza's corpus in more judicious and historically sensitive ways.

The improved quality of interpretations is especially evident in a series of important studies on Spinoza by British scholars near the end of the 19th century. Unlike earlier discussions of Spinoza, these works have an air of familiarity about them. The authors discuss their methodology, accurately cite original texts to support their interpretations, cite and engage each other's work, situate Spinoza's thought in its original 17th century context, and use then contemporary philosophy to critically evaluate Spinoza's conclusions. And yet, despite their scholarly familiarity, the main conclusions of these British interpreters are deeply out of step with the readings of Spinoza that have dominated the last 60 years of Spinoza interpretation.

According to these British interpreters, Spinoza ought to be read as a kind of frustrated idealist. In this, they echo the general conclusion of many others from the 19th century, most notably Hegel, though they reach their conclusions in novel ways and sometimes distance themselves from Hegel's reading. (In a companion essay, 'Hegel's Idealist Reading of Spinoza,' I discuss Hegel's influential idealist interpretation of Spinoza.) Happily, all of these 19th century British studies have recently been republished in paperback editions that are affordable and widely available through on-line bookstores. This new wave of old interpretations invites us to reexamine their conclusions.

In the first part of this article, I return to these neglected interpretations and present their case for an idealist reading of Spinoza. In the second half, I turn to a prominent contemporary Spinoza scholar, Michael Della Rocca. I show how Della Rocca's recent interpretation of Spinoza echoes, perhaps unwittingly, the idealist conclusions of 19th century British interpreters, even though Della Rocca reaches them in distinctive ways. In

addition, to surveying their interpretations, I also draw attention to the shared *criticism* behind their idealist readings: though Spinoza's own principles, consistently applied, end in a kind of idealism, he sometimes tried – but failed – to avoid it. And so, in the end, they believe Spinoza's idealism is symptomatic of his larger philosophical failure to achieve the metaphysical goals he set for himself.

The label 'idealist reading of Spinoza' covers a variety of territory, so let me be upfront about my focus. I will be most concerned with two importantly connected claims that have been traditionally associated with idealist interpretations, what I will call the 'idealist theses': (I.) Spinoza's attribute of thought is the sole fundamental attribute in his system and (II.) the existence of finite modes is illusory. Some idealist interpreters claim that Spinoza explicitly embraces these claims; others think he is forced to accept them on pains of inconsistency. But all agree that he ends up committed to some version of them, even if they are at odds with other aspects of his system. I begin with the British case for these conclusions (section 2), and then I turn to their most recent advocate (section 3).

2. British Idealist Readings

The weighty shadows of Kant and Hegel continued to shape interpretations of Spinoza through the 19th century. In this section, I will focus on Spinoza's reception in late 19th century Britain, which witnessed a mini-renaissance in Spinoza studies starting in the 1880s.[2] There was a growing sense that by the bicentennial of his death in 1877, Spinoza had at last overcome two centuries of castigation and scorn to assume his rightful place among the philosophical greats of the 17th century. A statue of Spinoza was even unveiled in The Hague, a public event that occasioned warm speeches about Spinoza's life and works.[3]

R.H.M. Elwes and William Hale White each published new English translations of Spinoza's works that proved long lasting. Johannes Van Vloten and J.P.N. Land produced a new critical edition of Spinoza's corpus, one far superior to previous editions.[4] Frederick Pollock, James Martineau and John Caird each wrote book-length studies of Spinoza's thought during the 1880s.[5] Harold Joachim followed this outburst with *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza: Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata* (1901), undoubtedly the most penetrating book on Spinoza from the period.[6] Although they disagree on some points, these interpreters agree in their most significant and sweeping conclusions, together forming what we would now regard as a school of Spinoza interpretation.

I will begin with an overview of their conclusions before turning to some of the details. A central theme in these British interpretations is that a tension lies at the heart of Spinoza's philosophy, one that he does not and perhaps cannot resolve. On the one hand, Spinoza clearly affirms that plentifully many mind-independent attributes and finite modes exist in, by, and through the sole possible substance, God (Ip11 and Ip16).[7] However, Spinoza fails to show how such ontological multiplicity can be reconciled with the unified and unlimited nature of the sole substance. In a sense, they charge, Spinoza wants both the One and the Many, but fails to show how his system can consistently preserve both. As Joachim puts it, 'In one sense, it is true, the whole problem of the *Ethics* is summed up in the question ''How can we conceive the being of a multiplicity in God?''' (J 220).

They conclude that this tension in Spinoza between real unity and real diversity is the point at which his system ultimately falls apart. 'How that essence [of substance] can be one and self-identical while its constituents are many, heterogeneous and unrelated is a question which is hopeless of solution' (M 185). Joachim calls it an outright contradiction:

'There is an inner contradiction in his conception of God as at once excluding all determination and comprehending an infinite diversity of ultimate characters' (J 106).

These interpreters acknowledge that Spinoza himself slides back and forth between 'these two conflicting lines of thought' (J 222), at times privileging the inner unity and limitless nature of substance and other at times privileging its rich inner diversity. The former, idealist-friendly tendency ends up reducing the apparent diversity of attributes and modes into illusions of Thought; the latter reduces the unity of substance into that of a mere abstract collection. Philosophically unbalanced, Spinoza 'poised his philosophy in an unstable equilibrium, whence it inevitably verged, with every breath, to either side' (M 189).

In the face of this instability, these British interpreters favor (to differing degrees) the idealist theses as the most consistent tendency of his thought, even if it isn't the only strand in the texts. 'We shall see hereafter that [Spinoza] himself could not maintain the balance, but gave unawares an indefinite preponderance to the ideal side' (M 189). This echoes Caird's conclusion: 'In this whole doctrine, indeed, as to the relation of the ideal and the material, we find an unconscious preponderance ascribed to the ideal side' (C 202). Pollock notes that 'though the system escapes the snares of subjective idealism, it does not escape idealism altogether' (P 182). J. Clark Murray captures this consensus in an 1896 *Philosophical Review* article:

> But not only do the foundations of Spinoza's system thus assume the idealistic point of view; we are raised to the same point of view at almost every step in the erection of the superstructure (Murray, 'The Idealism of Spinoza,' 474).

But while these interpreters emphasize and develop the idealist tendencies of Spinoza's system, they conclude in the end that these tendencies cannot be fully integrated into Spinoza's system, making their final verdict on Spinoza as forthright as it is bleak. But they take such candor about Spinoza's shortcomings to be a mark of their earnest and respectful engagement with his thought. In the next two sections, I will focus on Spinoza's doctrines of attributes and finite modes, where the purest form of the problem facing Spinoza's system seems to arise.

2.1 ATTRIBUTES

The British interpreters raise a series of concerns about Spinoza's theory of attributes, which centers around his claim that God or substance has 'an infinity' of parallel and equally basic attributes (Id6, Ip9, Ip10d, IIp7s). For the sake of space, I'll focus here on the two concerns that are most closely connected to idealist thesis I.[8] First, doesn't Spinoza's definition of an attribute in terms of a feature of Thought (Id4) make Thought the most fundamental attribute? Furthermore, if Thought *is* the most fundamental attribute, doesn't it thereby become the *only* genuine attribute? Second, does Spinoza actually prove that a substance can have more than one attribute in the first place? Spinoza's failure to give satisfactory answers to these questions, they conclude, highlights his inability to reconcile the multiplicity of co-equal attributes with the unified nature of his substance. As Joachim summarizes, 'The Doctrine of the ''Infinity of Attributes,'' though Spinoza could not logically discard it, remains incompletely assimilated in his philosophy, and serves only to project shadows of confusion within it' (J 70n2).

The first problem arises largely because Spinoza defines the nature of an attribute in terms of an activity of Thought: 'By attribute I understand what *the intellect perceives* of a substance as constituting its essence' (Id4, emphasis mine). According to this definition,

to be an attribute is to be essentially related to an intellect's perceptions, an activity of Thought. Spinoza is even more emphatic in an early letter: 'I understand the same [about substance] by attribute, except that it is called attribute in relation to the intellect, which attributes such and such a definite nature to substance' (Ep9). This means, they reasoned, that all other attributes are dependent on, and hence less fundamental than, Thought (idealist thesis I). In fact, the Thought-dependence may go yet further. For Spinoza defines his basic ontological categories (Id3 and Id5) and relations (Id1, Iax1, Iax2, Iax5) at least partly in terms of *conceptual* relations.[9] And so if conceptual relations are also just relations of Thought, then the attribute of thought will be as pervasive and fundamental in Spinoza's basic ontology as it is in his account of attributes.

But, the British interpreters objected, if Thought is so pervasive and fundamental, then serious problems arise. The apparent plurality of God's attributes would dissolve into a plurality of ways of thinking about God, in which case 'we find that Thought swallows up all other attributes; for all conceivable attributes turn out to be objective aspects of Thought itself' (P 187). That is, if it is part of the nature of things and attributes to bear a relation to Thought, then Thought becomes a kind of Super-attribute, the most fundamental way of conceiving and being a substance.

In fact, the British idealists continued, if Thought is the sole fundamental attribute, then Thought is also the only genuine attribute.

> For 'through' Thought alone can anything be 'conceived;' Extension cannot conceive Extension; this second 'attribute' must wait for the first for its conceptual phase, and is therefore (according to [Id4]) no 'attribute' at all; and there remains only the Thinking principle (M 188).

The argument here may be that a necessary condition for being an attribute is being wholly self-contained (Ip10). But, the objection goes, apart from Thought, other candidate attributes aren't wholly self-contained. They depend for their full characterization on Thought, the most fundamental attribute. Hence they do not qualify as attributes after all.[10] Thought alone meets the self-sufficiency condition. Hence, by Spinoza's own account of an attribute, it follows that 'all Attributes but thought are really superfluous, and Spinoza's doctrine, when thus reduced to its simplest terms, is that nothing exists but thought and its modifications' (P 184).

Although independent, their second concern, that Spinoza fails to prove that a substance can have more than one attribute, becomes unsurprising given the first. After all, if Spinoza has set-up his account of attributes in such a way that Thought is the most fundamental, and therefore the only, attribute, then no wonder Spinoza fails to demonstrate that a substance can have more than one fundamental attribute in the first place.

As before, this charge is not without some *prima facie* merit. Spinoza appears to assume the consistency of one substance having multiple attributes in Id6 and Ip11, despite its controversial nature.[11] In a key proposition, Spinoza claims that possessing greater degrees of reality is correlated with possessing more attributes: 'The more reality or being each thing has, the more attributes belong to it' (Ip9). But at best, this claim is axiomatic, as it receives no actual demonstration. The demonstration simply reads, 'This is evident from Id4,' which threatens to substitute definitional fiat for proof. Spinoza comes closer to an actual proof in Ip10d, but he relies there on the claim that the multiple (and causally co-fundamental) attributes are all co-eternal, which seems to beg the question at hand. And when Spinoza sets out to prove that more than the just the attribute of Thought actually exists, his demonstration is frustratingly thin: 'The demonstration [that Extension is an attribute of God] proceeds in the same way as that of the proceeding Proposition [that Thought is an attribute of God]' (IIpd2).

The British interpreters therefore conclude that Spinoza achieves the plurality of attributes by mere stipulation. 'In his conception of Attributes,' Joachim writes, 'Spinoza has attempted to reconcile the absolute unity of Reality with its absolute fullness of content.' But as to 'how' this unity and diversity, the One substance and the Many attributes, are to be reconciled, 'we can find no answer in Spinoza: he merely asserts the fact' (J 103). Caird agrees: 'Failing to find such logical ground [for differentiating attributes, Spinoza] simply asserts without proof the differentiation of substance into attributes' (C 142).

Nor do they think it is merely accidental that Spinoza fails to prove the existence or even possibility of multiple attributes. For, Joachim claims, 'there is no principle on which this variety is intelligible as the variety of the one Substance' (J 103). In short, they object, because Thought is fundamental (idealist thesis I), the one substance ultimately lacks the rich internal diversity of attributes that Spinoza sometimes stipulates but never establishes. And so in the end, Pollock concludes, Spinoza's attribute doctrine stands out mostly as a 'magnificent attempt at an impossible symmetry of the universe' (P 188).

2.2 FINITE MODES

Some of the problems the British interpreters raise about Spinoza's doctrine of modes are very similar to the ones they pressed against his doctrine of attributes. They acknowledge that, just as had done with attributes, Spinoza explicitly affirms the existence of an infinity of modes (Ip16). But, they again conclude, based on his own principles, Spinoza does not and perhaps even cannot justify this assertion.

The first hint that something is amiss occurs in the placement of Ip16 itself. Just as the basis for Spinoza's infinity of attributes doctrine had appeared out of the blue (Ip9), Spinoza's assertion of infinitely many modes in Ip16 is quite abrupt. Proposition 15 concluded his case for substance monism: 'Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God.' The next proposition can read like a jarring declaration: 'From the necessity of the divine nature, there must follow infinitely many things in infinitely many ways (i.e., everything which can fall under an infinite intellect).' And with that claim, Caird notes, 'the colorless blank becomes at a stroke filled up with rich and varied content' (C 144).

But just as with the demonstration of *attribute* plenitude in Ip9, Spinoza proves mode plentitude by appealing only to a stipulated definition and an undeclared axiom. In fact, the axiom in Ip16d is remarkably similar to the axiom in Ip9: an intellect 'infers more properties the more the definition of the thing expresses reality' (Ip16d). And once again, the fact that Spinoza must rely on terminological stipulations and undeclared axioms to establish mode plenitude is taken to be a non-accidental defect. 'The sudden step into finiteness is wholly unexplained – nay is made under conditions which have been carefully proved to exclude it' (M 205).

Furthermore, just as issues of attribute pluralism were muddied by Spinoza's reference to an intellect in Id4, so too Spinoza's presentation of mode pluralism Ip16 is linked to the activities of an intellect, raising again the specter of merely mind-dependent diversity. And so, as with the attributes, 'we are left with no rational answer to the question ''How – on what principle – can Substance, in spite of its unity, reveal itself in an order of diverse states?''' (J 108). The pattern of their criticism is clear: Spinoza's stated ambitions notwithstanding, he fails to reconcile his substance monism with genuine diversity.

Yet despite the structural parallels and problems between attribute and mode plenitude, there is a distinct concern with reconciling the nature of substance with the existence of *finite* modes, according to these interpreters (J 110n1).[12] As Hegel had emphasized,

Spinoza thinks it is part of the nature of finite things to involve negation. 'Finiteness is nothing positive, but only a partial negation of existence' (M 205). Part of the very definition of finite things is given in terms of negation: to be finite is to lack a certain amount of reality, to be limited in its own kind (Id2, Ip8s1). But if substance is fully real, how can it contain any measure of limitation or negation?

> For 'determinate' signals nothing positive…[But] God is absolutely indeterminate, because he excludes nothing real, or comprises himself in all character. Hence to conceive God (or substance) as he really is ('in se') is to conceive him in the fullness of his being: and this involves the setting aside of all limitations, and therefore, all 'modes' as such (J 44–5).

Despite their affinities with Hegel, the British interpreters tried hard to avoid Hegel's conclusion that Spinoza was an acosmicist, someone who denied the existence of finite things altogether. Instead, they argued that individuating the world into finite individuals is an activity of the imagination for Spinoza, a diversity that is in some sense real, even if false *sub specie aeternitatis*:

> It is possible for imagination to lend to particular finite beings…an apparent independence or individuality. But this individuality is purely fictitious…when Thought penetrates to the reality of things, it discerns their individual independence to be an illusion (C 123).

Pollock adds a pragmatic ground: 'The nature of things is really continuous…but in the common uses of life our imagination parcels it out for convenience' (P 191).

But this halfway house, according to which the parceling out the world into a series of finite individuals is an activity of the imagination, is not a stable solution, Joachim realizes. 'The modal apprehension is in part illusory, and the illusion is a fact – and yet a fact for which no place can be found in Spinoza's conception of the ultimate nature of things' (J 112). That is, we cannot attribute the source of individuating finite modes to finite perspectives and at the same time assert that, at bottom, there are no such finite perspectives. Hence, Joachim concludes, acosmicism is the real terminus of Spinoza's system, even if it would be false according to abstracted, limited, imaginary perspectives – were (*per impossibile*!) such perspectives to exist.

And so Spinoza faces the same unhappy alternatives for finite modes that he faced for attributes. On the one hand, Spinoza can maintain the unlimited and hence undifferentiated unity of substance, but at the cost of losing a real diversity of fundamental attributes (as in idealist thesis I) and a real diversity of finite individuals (as in idealist thesis II). Or Spinoza can accept the real plurality of attributes and finite modes, but at the cost of transforming the unity of substance into a mere abstract collection of distinct entities. But he can't have both his one and his many. The strand of Thought-dependence running throughout the *Ethics*, coupled with Spinoza's insistence on the real unity of substance outside the *Ethics*, made it clear to the British interpreters which alternative Spinoza would take.

3. The Most Recent Idealist Reading: Michael Della Rocca

Between the late 19th century British interpreters and contemporary Anglo-American readers of Spinoza lies the rise and flourishing of analytic philosophy. And as general Anglo-American philosophical interests in idealism began to wane in the early to mid 20th century, so too did sympathies for British idealist interpretations of Spinoza. (When Joachim cited F.H. Bradley as the philosopher who gave the best expression of 'the essence

of Spinoza's doctrine' (102n1), he didn't exactly help his cause, as Bradley became the most visible target of the early analytic movement.)

Edwin Curley's groundbreaking *Spinoza's Metaphysics* in 1969, which explicitly interpreted Spinoza through the lens of (then current) trends in analytic philosophy, helped establish Spinoza's relevance to a generation of readers weaned on the likes of Frege, Russell, and Quine. And given how early analytic philosophers cut their teeth rejecting British Hegelianism, it is unsurprising that Spinoza read in the light of their philosophical trajectories also emerges completely free from idealist tendencies. The anti-idealism of Curley's Spinoza was especially strong in Curley's interpretation of the attribute of thought. Curley argued that ideas, for Spinoza, are *propositions* whose relation to other ideas is *logical* in kind. In Curley's deft hands, the realm of the psychological and the mental in Spinoza became the realm of propositional logic, parallel to a realm of facts.[13]

Not everyone was won over, of course, and while many agreed that Curley's naturalizing account lent Spinoza newfound respectability as a philosophical conversation partner, critics argued that Curley's logicist reading of the mental in Spinoza was not a very plausible interpretation. Michael Della Rocca was among those who rejected Curley's interpretation. He provided an alternative interpretation of the attribute of thought that highlighted the ineliminable role of the psychological in Spinoza's system.[14] Della Rocca has since worked on tracing what he sees as the contours of Spinoza's rationalism, embodied in the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). Della Rocca argues that Spinoza's refusal to accept brute facts underwrites much of Spinoza's philosophical ambitions.[15] One such PSR-based principle drives Della Rocca towards both our idealist theses and their critical terminus.[16]

What, according to Spinoza, is the nature of existence? Della Rocca leans on the PSR to show that existence cannot be an unanalyzed, primitive relation for Spinoza. Rather, Della Rocca argues, Spinoza reduces existence to being conceived or being intelligible. In slogan form, *to be is to be conceived*. Although he argues for this striking conclusion on the basis of the PSR, Della Rocca is not alone in reaching it. Pollock made the same point (despite his own suspicions about the PSR in Spinoza): 'It may indeed be asked what we mean by existence; and the question is not only reasonable but an important one.' Pollock's answer: 'I think there can hardly be a reasonable doubt that for Spinoza to exist and to be intelligible were all one' (P 173–4).

The collapse of existence into being conceived is already quite idealist-friendly, at least if conceptual relations are exclusively mental relations for Spinoza. To exist just is to bear a mental relation to some mind. Della Rocca has since gone further, using the existence-intelligibility connection to reach the full-blown idealist theses about finite modes and attributes in Spinoza's system.

Let's begin with finite modes. Because to exist just is to be conceived or to be intelligible, there do not exist unintelligible things. According to Della Rocca, modes are made intelligible through their causes and, equivalently, through that in which they inhere (RR 42–7). But, he argues, passive states of finite modes are not completely in anything else (not themselves, a collection of finite modes, nor God), in which case they are not fully intelligible.[17] Hence, Della Rocca concludes, finite modes, insofar as they contain passive states, do not fully exist, an insight he even applies to you and me: 'What's worse, insofar as we have affects we ourselves are unintelligible and do not exist…this is simply an instance of the more general insight that passivity is not fully real, that passivity strips things of their existence to some degree' (RR 52).[18] The apparently diverse world of partly passive finite modes does not, in the end, fully exist (idealist thesis II).

Like most of the British interpreters, Della Rocca tries to avoid Hegel's conclusion of unqualified acosmicism in Spinoza. For one, Della Rocca emphasizes that existence comes in degrees, and so his conclusion is that finite things don't *fully* exist. (Caird and Pollock make similar qualifications (C 171 and P 177)). Secondly, Della Rocca's argument works for finite modes insofar as they contain passive states, leaving open the possibility that there are fully existing, fully active finite modes. But Della Rocca is doubtful that there can be such things for Spinoza: 'But it is not entirely clear to me that Spinoza is entitled to the view that I have ideas that are not, at some remove, caused from outside my mind' (RR 51). And so, also like the British interpreters, Della Rocca points critically to a conflict between Spinoza's stated desire for a plurality of finite things and what his principles actually entitle him to affirm.

The reduction of existence to intelligibility also has idealistic consequences for Spinoza's attributes. Della Rocca tries to avoid turning the attribute of thought into the *sole* attribute, recognizing that the plentitude and parallelism of 'an infinity' of attributes is undeniably Spinoza's intent. But Thought nonetheless ascends to a special place in Della Rocca's Spinoza, since what it is for a body to exist is for that body to be conceived. It isn't conceived under the attribute of thought, of course – to be a body is to be conceived as an *extended* mode. But to be a body is to bear a mental relation to extension; indeed, to be an attribute at all – a way of conceiving substance – is to bear a mental relation to some intellect. As he puts it, 'Spinoza does hold that the nature of each thing consists in the thing's availability to thought' (RI). This does not force Della Rocca to deny the existence of extension or bodies, nor does it require him to embrace some sort of subjectivism about the other attributes. (Although if he wants to maintain Extension *as a genuine attribute*, Della Rocca needs to resist the British interpreters' inference from non-fundamentality to non-attribute.) But his interpretation does commit him to a priority of the attribute of thought in the sense that relations to Thought constitute the most fundamental form of attributes, modes, and extra-mental relations. And that's just to be committed to a version of idealist thesis I.

Della Rocca has even suggested that the PSR-based existence-intelligibility thesis may move us beyond these idealist conclusions – even beyond Spinoza himself (RI). Taking a page from none other than Bradley, Della Rocca argues that by the PSR, relations, *even internal relations,* are to some degree unintelligible. And so, given the convertibility of existence and unintelligibility, relations do not fully exist. Joachim reached the same conclusion: 'God is the ultimate whole in which all connexions are, and in whose unity all relations disappear or are absorbed' (J 118).

This means that relations internal to Spinoza's substance, such as the 'constitution' relation between substance and its attributes (Id6), are not fully real. But, Della Rocca argues, the explicability of Spinoza's substance requires an internal relation between that substance and its attributes (EE). In other words, to be intelligible, Spinoza's substance must bear a relation to its attributes. But since relations do not fully exist, Spinoza's substance is not fully intelligible. And so, moving back across the existence-intelligibility bridge, it follows that Spinoza's substance also does not fully exist. Della Rocca acknowledges that this is a conclusion that Spinoza could not consistently accept. But that makes the dilemma facing Spinoza all the worse. Put bluntly, Spinoza's overarching demand for complete intelligibility is inconsistent with his theory of substance. The PSR and Spinoza's system here part company, according to Della Rocca: Spinoza's rationalism is ultimately inconsistent with his metaphysics.

Although this final conclusion speeds Della Rocca past even the interpretive wilds of Hegel and the British interpreters, it contains an important echo of their critical

conclusions. Here's another way to cast Della Rocca's point. In order to be intelligible, Spinoza's substance requires an internally diverse structure, in terms of attributes and modes. But having that diverse structure is inconsistent with the wholly intelligible and active nature of Spinoza's substance. The general conclusion drawn is that *the nature of Spinoza's substance is inconsistent with a real diversity of attributes and modes*, a judgment shared by the British interpreters. The one and the many, that great hope of Spinozistic metaphysics, is ultimately unattainable on Spinoza's own terms. And although Della Rocca reaches this conclusion in distinctive ways via the PSR, the critical bite is hauntingly familiar: in the final analysis, Spinoza cannot achieve the metaphysical desiderata he sets for himself.

Where does this leave us? I hope it shows concretely that previous generations of interpretations can still reward study, even if they were produced in different intellectual contexts than our own. But even more, I hope Spinoza's contemporary readers sense a philosophical challenge in the air. Many will want to resist the bleak idealist conclusion that Spinoza's metaphysics harbors an irresolvable tension. Yet the interpretive assumptions at work in these different readings are not patently wrongheaded. Spinoza really does seem concerned in his ontology to maintain both the many attributes and modes and the one unified, unlimited substance. He really does seem driven by *both* PSR-laden rationalism *and* non-idealism. This ought to make the damning conclusion of these idealist readings all the more worrisome. In the end, can Spinoza have it all? I leave off here in the hope that readers will be stirred up to revisit and answer afresh these long-standing challenges facing Spinoza's system.

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Short Biography

Samuel Newlands' research interests include 17th-century philosophy, philosophy of religion, and contemporary metaphysics. He has published on philosophy in a variety of venues, such as *Noûs*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Oxford Handbook to Spinoza*, and *The Routledge Companion to Seventeenth Century Philosophy*. He is the co-editor of *Metaphysics and the Good: Themes from the Philosophy of Robert Merrihew Adams* (OUP 2009). He has received a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities for his work on Spinoza and is currently co-directing a four-year research initiative, 'The Problem of Evil in Modern and Contemporary Thought' (http://evilandtheodicy.com). He is an assistant professor of philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. Prior to arriving at Notre Dame, he completed his PhD in philosophy at Yale University.

Notes

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[1] For a magisterial history of Spinoza's reception, see Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*.

[2] For historically rich discussions of Spinoza's reception in other countries in the 19th century, see essays in the second half of Tosel, Moreau, and Salem, *Spinoza au XIXe siècle*, which curiously lacks a section on Spinoza in Britain.
[3] Several of the speeches are printed in Knight, *Spinoza: Four Essays*.
[4] For a helpful overview of several previous critical editions, see Piet Steenbakkers, 'Les éditions de Spinoza en Allemagne au XIXe siècle.'
[5] Shorter pieces on Spinoza that appeared in English during this period have been reprinted in Bucher, *Spinoza: Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Discussions*. Reading through them will greatly enhance the reader's esteem for the philosophical and stylistic virtues of Caird, et al.
[6] For a history of some of these figures, see Parkinson, 'Spinoza and British Idealism: The Case of H.H. Joachim.'
[7] For a very concise overview of Spinoza's ontology of substance, attributes, and modes, see section 2 of the companion essay, 'Hegel's Idealist Reading of Spinoza.'
[8] Here are two others that crop up frequently in their discussions. First, if the attribute of Thought contains ideas of the modes of other attributes as well as ideas of its own ideas, how can the modes of Thought be equinumerous with the modes of other attributes, as Spinoza's parallelism doctrine seems to require? Second, if there are 'an infinity' of attributes of substance, why are we aware of only two, Thought and Extension?
[9] For more on this point, see Newlands, 'Another Kind of Spinozistic Monism.'
[10] *Cf.* Spinoza's explicit strategies in the *Short Treatise* to reject other candidate attributes (KV I.7).
[11] Descartes, for instance, would have regarded it as incoherent (CSM I, 298).
[12] Though they do not pursue it, the same concern may apply to infinite modes as well, insofar as they are at most 'infinite in their own kind' (Id6e), which also involves negation (I am grateful to an anonymous referee for this point).
[13] Curley, *Spinoza's Metaphysics*, 120–6. Curley may have since backed off some of his strongest anti-psychological claims (Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method*, 139n12).
[14] Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza.*
[15] Della Rocca, *Spinoza.*
[16] For a very different recent idealist reading of Spinoza, see Sprigge, *Theories of Existence*, 153–76 and *The God of Metaphysics*, 17–95. For starkly different discussions of Sprigge, see Forrest, 'Sprigge's Spinoza' and Thomas, *Intuition and Reality*, 73–85.
[17] Della Rocca too pushes aside infinite modes (RR 48n35).
[18] Caird makes a similar point (C 281); Della Rocca cites Joachim approvingly here (RR 50).

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