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Truth and Order; or, Why Isn't Spinoza an Idealist?

To my mind the *Ethica* is, with perhaps the exceptions of the *Parmenides* or Hegel's *Logik*, the most difficult text in Western philosophy's standard repertoire. And Spinoza's geometrical method, although an obvious suspect, doesn't seems to me to be the main source of this: a decent student will learn to navigate the argumentative threads and discover most of the important structural points (the load-bearing propositions, as it were) after only two or three readings. It seems to me that there are two other factors far more responsible for the text's difficulty. First, that it is not finished. Or not the carpentry sense, anyhow: obviously the *Ethica* is "complete," but there are moments of redundancy, certain important points seem undeveloped, and several of the demonstrations seem questionable. Second, and perhaps more frightfully, that there is a kind of *terminological* ambiguity. This is something Spinoza himself hints at in the middle of his definitions of the affects:

I'm aware that these terms [favor and indignation, in this case] signify something different according to common use. But my intention is not to explicate the signification of words but rather the nature of things, and to indicate these things with terms of which the signification that they have according to use does not completely reject the signification with which I want to employ [usurpare] them; one warning of this should suffice.¹

Thus, although Spinoza forces no serious neologisms or obvious terminological revolutions in his text – a fact which is itself remarkable – if we simply read off his meaning from the conventional sense of his words, then we will quickly find ourselves lost. Spinoza does not "use" (uti) the philosophical terms of his day so much as he, as he says, *usurps* them (usurpare). A proper vocabulary for what Spinoza describes, namely the "rerum natura," seems not to exist. To

¹ IIIda19-20exp: "Haec nomina ex communi usu aliud significare scio. Sed meum institutum non est, verborum significationem, sed rerum naturam explicare, easque iis vocabulis indicare, quorum significatio, quam ex usu habent, a significatione, qua eadem usurpare volo, non omnino abhorret, quod semel monuisse sufficiat." For this essay I quote the *Ethica* and the other works from the Gebhardt edition. All translations are my own.

indicate that nature he must instead do a kind of limited violence to the common usage (usus) of the words at hand – limited only in that the common signification "non omnino abhorret," does not completely abhor, what he wants the words to do. And this serves to highlight what seems to me the single greatest obstacle to understanding the *Ethica*: whenever we pass a word, a sentence, even a whole section, we often lack any easy way to decide exactly what Spinoza means. The result of this fact, and even more of this terminological instability's tendency to go unnoticed, is a steadily growing scholarly warehouse's worth of Spinozas all differing in character, soil, and vintage. Each reader seems to find a new Spinoza, usually a Spinoza claiming things the reader already understood long before tackling the *Ethica*. These Spinozas are often strange half-duplicates of other philosophers: this one a necessitarian Descartes, that one an early Nietzsche, the next a late Stoic, and this last a Maimonides gone sour. If we are to avoid simply throwing more Spinozas on this pile, we might first refuse to help ourselves to Spinoza's language unthinkingly. In order to reorient ourselves away from the "common use" and towards the "nature of things" which he purports to tell us, we might try to see precisely how he will "usurp" the words of the tradition for his own intentions.

The nominal topic of this paper is to compare Spinoza to an *idealist* position (a somewhat vague term which I shall try to make more exact). There are a number of points in Spinoza's metaphysics where something like this idealist position *should have become attractive*, particularly for reasons of theoretical economy. And yet Spinoza is *not* an idealist, at least not on the characterization of "idealism" I'm going to propose. So: why not? Beyond that, however, I wish to use this question to reach something much more specific with wider consequences. The goal is to work out and expose the "usurped" meaning of a single structurally vital term in the *Ethica*, one that tends to be passed over even faster than most: *truth*. What I really intend is to

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expose a philosophically fascinating *spinning-out* of the concept of truth that manifests during the post-Cartesian era generally, and which is particularly evident in Spinoza.

But all of these discussions, and especially the interpretation of the *Ethica*, need to be prepared by some initial remarks on the sense of "idealism" and (first) "idea."

I. What Idealism Might Be

"Idealism" (as I would use the term, anyway; I by no means intend to set the word in concrete, and others may take issue with it as they please) is not a position that can be taken up, as it were, from nowhere. It is a *response* to certain very specific problems, problems which – simply to come up *at all* – require a heavy load of assumption. One cannot turn to "idealism" unless one first believes 1. that there are certain entities called *ideas*, 2. that there are, or that there could be, or (more precisely) that someone could be tempted to introduce into their ontic scheme, other entities called *material things*, and 3. that there is a *real distinction* between ideas and things.² These premises present not a wholly determined position, not even "idealism" itself, but rather the playspace for a whole series of positions. Their core consists in a certain puzzle as to the *relation* between the two sorts of entity ("idea" and "thing"). And this puzzle comes to the forefront especially through and beyond Descartes.

Descartes writes: "...I indeed extend [the term 'idea'] to everything which is thought."³ Idea means cogitatum; the idea is not a "thought" (i.e. a thinking, an operation of the mind), but rather *that which gets thought* in a thinking. One should first understand this in the most naïve sense possible. Suppose I think of my next door neighbor – that man, whatever else he may be, is here an idea (in that he *is thought*). And in this case the idea is presumably not (e.g.) some mere mental item floating around in a shadowy limbo, as Russell might have said, but rather the very

² I use "real distinction" in the precise technical sense intended by Descartes and the scholastics. Thus I mean a distinction among the "res," that "idea" and "thing" should be *different entities* however they are otherwise related. ³ AT VII 366: "...ego [nomen ideae] vero ad id omne quod cogitatur, extendo."

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man himself – "an actual man with a tailor and a bank-account or a public-house and a drunken wife."⁴ If we take this definition of idea as cogitatum seriously, then it should even extend so broadly as to *cut across the divide between thinking and extended things*. If anything whatsoever, on either side, gets thought at all, then it is henceforth admitted into the ranks of ideas.

But something is strange about this. Why should my neighbor, apparently a self-sufficient entity in good standing, suddenly (as idea) be understood in relation to a *thinking* – my own thinking or any other? What relation does the "idea" – entity which is thought – have to thought itself? (One recalls Kant's 1772 letter to Herz on the relation of representation and object.)

Descartes will sometimes call the idea "forma," the *form* of a thought: "By the name *idea* I understand the very form of any thought whatsoever, through immediate perception of which I am conscious of the very same thought."⁵ Evidently "form" is not meant in the sense most common to contemporary prose – a kind of frame or sketch devoid of specific content – but rather as something closer to the $\epsilon i \delta o c / i \delta \epsilon a$ in Platonic philosophy and theology. This is confirmed in a comment to Hobbes:

This [objection] wants only images of the material things depicted in the corporeal imagination to be understood by the name "idea".... But I explain everywhere... that I take the name "idea" to mean everything that is immediately perceived by the mind – to the point that, because I perceive willing and fearing in myself when I will and fear, the very same will and fear are numbered by me among the ideas. I have used this name because long ago it was the common term by which the philosophers had to signify the forms of the perceptions of the divine mind, although we would acknowledge no imagination in God; and I have no [name] more suitable.⁶

The form or idea is what is intellectually seen (εἶδος/iδἑa), the substantive object paired up with

any thought-event (the paradigm case here apparently being that of *divine* thinking). But it is still

⁴ *The Principles of Mathematics Vol. I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1903), 53. The relevance of this discussion to the question of *denotation* and (more fundamentally) of *intentionality* should be obvious.

⁵ AT VII 160: "*Ideae* nomine intellego cujuslibet cogitationis formam illam, per cujus immediatam perceptionem ipsius ejusdem cogitationis consius sum..."

⁶ AT VII 181: "Hic nomine ideae vult tantum intellegi imagines rerum materialium in phantasia corporea depictas.... Atqui ego passim ubique... ostendo me nomen ideae sumere pro omni eo quod immediate a mente percipitur, adeo ut cum volo & timeo, quia simul percipio me velle et timere, ipsa volitio et timor inter ideas a me numerentur. Ususque sum hoc nomine, qui jam tritum erat a Philosophis ad formas perceptionum mentis divinae significandas, quamvis nullam in Deo phantasiam agnoscamus; & nullam aptius habebam."

unclear what that "pairing" amounts to. The cogito requires both cogitare and cogitatum – but what is the relationship between them? Might one take precedence over the other? If so, which comes first, thinking or the idea? The ambiguous genitive in the expressions "forma cogitationis" and "forma perceptionis" neatly expresses much of the difficulty: is the idea merely a kind of *consequence* of the work of thinking, given by way of the thought's immediate presentation to the I? Or is it the idea which first makes conscious thinking possible by, as it were, allowing itself or even forcing itself into immediate presentation? If I am afraid, as in Descartes' own example, then I am conscious of my fearing and to this extent I have a certain idea – namely, *fear*. But what is this object, "fear"? Is it a mere "side effect" (so to speak) produced by my act of thinking, or is it something else (perhaps a genuine, disturbed state of my body resulting from a terrifying situation) that itself prompts the "fearing" as act?

Descartes' position on this question is a bit delicate, but quite consistent. In the case of *God* one should say the former: the ideas are produced by the thought. Thus he writes in reply to Mersenne's objection that the idea of God may be a mere "ens rationis":

And indeed it is not true [that the idea of God is *ens rationis*] with the sense wherein what is understood by *ens rationis* is "something which is not," but rather only [with the sense] wherein every operation of the understanding is *ens rationis*, that is, an entity produced by reason; and moreover the whole of this world can be said to be *ens rationis*, that is, created by a simple act of the divine mind.⁷

This position, it seems to me, has its roots in the doctrine of the creation of eternal truths circa 1630. It is a position with deep consequences (some of which will be seen in Spinoza), but it is *only* valid for the case of divine thought. *For us*, matters are reversed – ideas seem to precede our thinking about them, and not the other way around. Even for the cases in which the thought seems most obviously to hang on the will of the thinker – e.g., in pure mathesis – the ideas are

⁷ AT VII 134: "Neque enim hoc eo sensu verum est, quo per *ens rationis* intelligitur id quod non est, sed eo tantum quo omnis operatio intellectus *ens rationis*, hoc est a ratione profectum; atque etiam totus hic mundus *ens rationis* divinae, hoc est ens per simplicem actum mentis divinae creatum, dici potest."

not simply *produced* by that thinker:

In this case I presume what needs be considered most of all is that I discover [invenio] before me innumerable ideas of certain things which, even if they may perhaps exist nowhere beyond me, still cannot be said to be nothing; and although they may be thought by me in some sense by choice, still they are not invented by me, but rather have their own true and immutable natures.⁸

That (e.g.) the angles of a triangle add up to 180 degrees – I may produce this thought anytime I

want, basically by fiat. But I could not do so were the idea of the triangle not somehow already

given beforehand "apud me" (as Descartes says with brilliant ambiguity). This is not yet to say

that any such material idea (= entity which is thought) properly exists, only that it has some

status as an entity; it is not a mere nothing. The move to establish the existence of at least some

of these ideas (the ones given in sensation) must be made in a different fashion, e.g.:

Now a certain passive faculty of sensibility, or [sive] of the receptivity and cognition of the ideas of sensible things, is most certainly in me, but I can have no use of this unless a certain active faculty of producing or even effecting these same ideas also exists, whether in me or in another. But this [active faculty] cannot rightly be in I myself since it plainly presupposes no understanding, and [since] these ideas are produced without my cooperation and often even with my reluctance: therefore it remains that it is in some substance distinct from me, in which all the reality that is *objective* in the ideas produced by that faculty (as I just observed above) ought to be either *formally* or *eminently*. Either this substance is a body, or [sive] a corporeal nature, in which of course is contained *formally* everything that is in the ideas *objectively*; or it is certainly God, or [vel] another creature more noble than body, in which it is contained *eminently*. But, since God is not false [fallax], it is wholly manifest that he does not insert these ideas into me either immediately by himself, nor even mediately via another creature in which the objective reality of these [ideas] is contained, not formally, but only eminently.... And so, corporeal things exist. Perhaps not everything of the sort exists wholly as I comprehend it through sensation, because sensation's very comprehension is highly obscure and confused in many cases; but at least everything is in it that I understand clearly and distinctly, that is, viewed generally, everything [in them] that is comprehended as an object in pure mathesis.⁹

⁸ AT VII 64: "Quodque hîc maxime considerandum puto, invenio apud me innumeras ideas quarumdam rerum, quae, etiam si extra me fortasse nullibi existant, non tamen dici possunt nihil esse; & quamvis a me quodammodo ad arbitrium cogitentur, non tamen a me finguntur, sed suas habent veras & immutabiles naturas."

⁹ AT VII 79-80: "Jam verò est quidem in me passiva quaedam facultas sentiendi, sive ideas rerum sensibilium recipiendi & cognoscendi, sed ejus nullum usum habere possem, nisi quaedam activa etiam existeret, sive in me, sive in alio, facultas istas ideas producendi vel efficiendi. Atque haec sane in me ipso esse non potest, quia nullam plane intellectionem praesupponit, & me non cooperante, sed saepe etiam invito, ideae istae producuntur: ergo superest ut sit in aliquâ substantiâ a me diversâ, in quâ quoniam omnis realitas vel formaliter vel eminenter inesse debet, quae est objective in ideis ab istâ facultate productis (ut jam supra animadverti), vel haec substantia est corpus, sive natura corporea, in quâ nempe omnia formaliter continentur quae in ideis objective; vel certe Deus est, vel aliqua creatura corpore nobilior, in quâ continentur eminenter. Atqui, cùm Deus non sit fallax, omnino manifestum est illum nec per se immediate istas ideas mihi immittere, nec etiam mediante aliquâ creaturâ, in quâ earum realitas objectiva, non formaliter, sed eminenter tantùm contineatur.... Ac proinde res corporeae existunt. Non tamen forte omnes tales omnino existunt, quales illas sensu comprehendo, quoniam ista sensuum comprehensio

Crucial for understanding Descartes' "proof of the external world" is to see in it an attempt, not to connect some free-floating "mental" things to additional concrete "material" things (and guarantee that connection with apodictic certainty), but rather to determine the ontic status of certain sensible material ideas already given to me. These ideas - tables, coffee cups, cars, etc. are already material, and I already think them as such. The question is whether these ideas (= entities which are thought) also have existence or some weaker manner of being. And the proof attempts to do this by way of answering how it can be that these ideas are given at all, i.e. by deciding where to locate the "active faculty" which must give me these ideas in the first place. For whatever has this capacity must exist. It seems not to be under my own power; it seems not to be in God or any other higher creature who would "have" the reality (i.e. the content) of these ideas only in an eminent way, i.e. *holding* it but not actually *exemplifying* it; so it must be in the very material ideas which I now sense, ideas which actually are (formally) the reality they present to me. And so, although I don't necessarily comprehend them with total transparency, these ideas must exist. What produces my thought about these ideas, i.e. prompts the immediate perception of the ideas, are the very same ideas themselves, as existing things.

It would be misguided to try to simplify all of this by calling Descartes a "direct realist" or somesuch. Even with sufficient qualifications, the use of such a term risks turning things upside down. Descartes does not first posit existing things of some kind out in the world and then try to tell a story about how we perceive them; rather, the procedure of the *Meditationes* is to begin with the gross fact of our perceiving something, whatever it may be (and however it may have got there), and then to establish conclusions as to the nature of the perceiving and the datum perceived. And for Descartes the ideas turn out to be not mere images (or similitudes) of the

in multis valde obscura est & confusa; sed saltem illa omnia in iis sunt, quae clare & distincte intelligo, id est omnia, generaliter spectata, quae in purae Matheseos objecto comprehenduntur." The italics are mine.

things,¹⁰ not any additional entity, but the things themselves as thought. My idea of the sun when I look at it is not a likeness of the sun or any other psychological impression, but *the sun itself* as I think it – even if only in a highly confused way. In that case (not necessarily the only case), my idea is the *very same entity* as the thing which causes me to "have" the idea.

This is not the place to talk with any detail about the problems of "occasionalism" that arose after and through Descartes' considerations; doing the topic any real justice would take too much time, would require discussions of causality in every major thinker from Suarez up to Hume and Kant, and would (I suspect) be well beyond my powers. It suffices to say that along with the metaphysical questioning of the *causal mechanism* by which the ideas are given to me (i.e., of the exterior "activa facultas" for their production) tends to go a tendency to *divorce* the ideas from the things. To illustrate this division, I confine myself to citing Malebranche:

I trust that all the world comes down in agreement that we do not perceive the objects outside of us by [par] themselves. We see the Sun, the Stars, and an infinitude of objects outside of us; and it is not plausible that the soul leaves the body and goes, so to speak, to promenade in the heavens for the contemplation of all those objects. Therefore [the soul] does not see them by themselves, and the immediate object of our mind, when for example it sees the Sun, is not the Sun, but rather something which is intimately united to our soul; and this I call *idea*. Thus, by the word *idea* I intend nothing other than that which is the immediate object, or [the object] nearest to the mind when it perceives some object – that is to say, that which touched and modified the mind with the perception which it has of an object.¹¹

The direct thinking of a thing, at the point we reach in Malebranche, is taken to be patently

impossible right from the start. I do not perceive the sun directly, rather the idea (immediate

object) modifies my mind in such a way as to give it a perception of the sun. (Admittedly, in one

¹⁰ This, despite some apparent temptation to make such a move at AT VII 37. There Descartes briefly considers that ideas in the proper sense may be "imagines," only to soundly reject such a view at VII 39-40.

¹¹ Recherche de la Vérité III, II, I, §I, in Oeuvres Complétes Tome I, ed. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1962), 413-14: "Je croi que tout le monde tombe d'accord, que nous n'appercevons point les objets qui sont hors de nous par eux-mêmes. Nous voyons le Soleil, les Etoiles, & une infinité d'objets hors de nous; & il n'est pas vraisemblable que l'ame sorte du corps, & qu'elle aille, pour ainsi dire, se promener dans les cieux, pour y contempler tous ces objets. Elle ne les voit donc point par eux-mêmes, & l'objet immediat de nôtre esprit, lorsqu'il voit le Soleil par exemple, n'est pas le Soleil, mais quelque chose qui est intimement unie à nôtre ame; & c'est ce que j'appelle *idée*. Ainsi par ce mot *idée*, je n'entends ici autre chose, que ce qui est l'objet immédiat, ou le plus proche de l'esprit, quand il apperçoit quelque objet, c'est-a-dire ce qui touché & modifie l'esprit de la perception qu'il a d'un objet."

way this very famous text is too precise: Malebranche will admit elsewhere to equivocating on the term "idea.")¹² Nevertheless it seems to me no gross simplification of his position to say this: everything we know is idea; and although for Malebranche God is already the "immediate object" par excellence, every other entity must be known through ideas which are *additional entities* "different from [the entities represented]."¹³ In the broadest sense of "idea" that he will allow – the idea as anything that in any way re-presents an object to a mind, clearly or not – this should presumably extend even to the most confused cases of our knowledge, namely that of our own souls and conjecture about those of others.¹⁴ Characteristic of this real distinction between idea and thing is the way Malebranche poses the problem of proving material bodies:

Thus, when we see bodies, let us judge only that we see them, and that these visible or intelligible bodies actually exist; but why might we judge positively that there is a material world outside, resembling the intelligible world that we see?¹⁵

Rather than Descartes' route of considering material ideas in the *Meditationes*, where the problem is to see whether they exist at all beyond merely being "apud me," with Malebranche the ideas (intelligible bodies) are granted full existence right off – albeit an *ideal* existence – and the only question is whether there are other, *external* bodies that correctly resemble them.

Malebranche's position, although by no means the only one possible in response to such difficulties, seems to me a very good example of the sort of ontic redoubling that results after Descartes: we arrive at an intelligible world of ideas and a material world of bodily things, and the two worlds are supposed to correspond to one another somehow. Moreover, the pairing is

¹² De la Recherche de la Vérité Éclaircissement IIIa, in Oeuvres Complétes Tome III, ed. Geneviève Rodis-Lewis (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1964), 44: "Ainsi ce mot, *idée*, est equivoque."

¹³ Recherche de la Vérité III, II, 7, §I, in Oeuvres Complétes Tome I 448.

¹⁴ This "broadest" sense obviously contradicts the narrower use of the term in, e.g., all of *Recherche de la Vérité* III, II, 7. But then see *Éclaircissement* IIIa: "C'est pour cela que j'ai dit quelquefois qu'on avoit une idée de l'ame, & que quelquefois je l'ai nié." "It is for this that I sometimes said that one has an idea of the soul, and sometimes denied it." In *Oeuvres Complétes Tome III*, 44.

¹⁵ De la Recherche de la Vérité Éclaircissement Via, in Oeuvres Complétes Tome III 60: "Ainsi, lorsque nous voyons des corps, jugeons seulement que nous en voyons & que ces corps visibles ou intelligibles existent actuellement; mais pourquoi jugerons-nous positivement qu'il y a au dehors un monde material, semblable au monde intelligible que nous voyons?"

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hardly an equal one. The only world which is *immediately* given is the ideal one: we see material bodies only via representation through the ideas, and even then only with our flank exposed to various skeptical attacks. One must deal with questions of how the worlds can causally interact, if at all (Malebranche gives up on this). And at the end of the day, the material world just doesn't seem to be doing much *work*. Indeed, for Malebranche the only convincing reason to admit its existence at all is as a matter of faith.¹⁶ The material world thus becomes a strange cosmic shadow, or a kind of metaphysical appendix.

By *idealism*, then, I shall henceforth understand a specific response to this ontic redoubling – namely, to simplify the model by wholly deleting this redundant, unnecessary, and highly dubious extra world. The idealist replies to the problem of relating idea and thing (once they are assumed to be really distinct entities) by crossing out the thing and thereby nullifying the relationship.

As I mean it, then, idealism represents a move towards theoretical coherence and ontic economy within this broader post-Cartesian situation. Rather than Quine's desert landscapes prevailing over overpopulated universes, here we negate the real Camelot (which we, like the lady of Shalott, never see directly) since it overcomplicates the story, and since all of its functions are already performed perfectly well by the Camelot we find in our mirror. For once one has already accepted the real distinction between idea and thing, idealism in this sense will presumably appear very quickly as a good way of cleaning up the problem. His faith excepted, Malebranche is already mere steps away from Berkeley: "If therefore it were possible for bodies to exist without the mind, yet to hold they do so, must needs be a very precarious position; since it is to suppose, without any reason at all, that God has created innumerable beings that are

¹⁶ ibid 64: "Certainement il n'y a que la Foi qui puisse nous convaincre qu'il y a effectivement des corps." "Certainly there is nothing but faith that can convince us that there really are bodies."

entirely useless, and serve to no manner of purpose."17

Thus, to the extent I say that Spinoza *should be* an idealist, I mean it only in this sense: that a certain possibility for theoretical and ontical simplification was available to him at very little cost. Of course, not every thinker need take every opportunity for simplification. (Kant notes that not everyone will actually be drawn what he called the "logical principle of genera," i.e. will actually seek to reduce all rudiments to the fewest possible number.)¹⁸ All the same, if Spinoza seems to have unnecessarily complicated his system by introducing a world of extension, we should presume that he has some reason. And my goal is to elucidate that reason.

II. Why Spinoza Should Be an Idealist: Two Cases

One of the most telling texts in the entire Opera in regards to how Spinoza sees his own

position vis-à-vis other philosophers comes, strangely enough, not from his own hand. Spinoza's

friend in Amsterdam, Lodewijk Meyer, penned a Preface to the Principia Philosophiae which

not only introduces that text but also serves to present Spinoza to the reading public. And when it

comes time to indicate that Spinoza by no means agrees with the Cartesian doctrine that he takes

to geometrically demonstrate, Meyer chooses one point in particular to emphasize:

In opposition, our Author would certainly admit that in the nature of Things there is a thinking substance: [but] nevertheless he denies that this constitutes the essence of human Mind; rather he holds that in the same mode that Extension has been determined by no limits, so too Thought is determined by no limits; to the point that, just as the human Body is not extension absolutely, but rather only determined by motion and rest as a certain mode following the laws of extended nature, so too the human Mind or [sive] Soul is not thought absolutely, but rather only determined by ideas as a certain mode following the laws of thinking nature, [and] one is concluded to be necessarily given whenever the human body begins to exist.¹⁹

 ¹⁷ Principles of Human Knowledge, ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 109.
 ¹⁸ See Critique of Pure Reason B679ff.

¹⁹ Opera I, 132: "Cùm contrà Author noster admittat quidem, in Rerum naturâ esse substantiam cogitantem: attamen neget illam constituere essentiam Mentis humanae; sed statuat, eodem modo, quo Extensio nullis limitibus determinata est, Cogitationem etiam nullis limitibus determinari; adeòque, quemadmodum Corpus humanum non est absolutè, sed tantùm certo modo secundùm leges naturae extensae per motum & quietem determinata extensio, sic etiam Mentem sive Animam humanam non esse absolutè, sed tantùm secundùm leges naturae cogitantis per ideas certo modo determinatam cogitationem, quae necessariò dari concluditur, ubi corpus humanum existere incipit." I would note in passing that the use of the term "modus" here already looks suspiciously technical.

One already finds hints of Spinoza's so-called "parallelism" within this quick and slightly elusive characterization of position (i.e. that if there is a human body then there must necessarily be a soul or mind to match it), but Meyer's emphasis lies on a more basic point which such a "parallelism" would presuppose. For Spinoza the attribute of thought is no longer something that inheres (and is exemplified) in specific discrete entities characterized by thinking, such as I myself. Instead thought is "extended" indefinitely, and thinking things are posited within it in a generalized, limitless field. There is, as it were, no "space of reason" opposed to a "space of law," but two distinct spaces of law. All of this is confirmed again, e.g., in Letter 32:

...I judge that [the human mind] too is part of Nature; for I indeed posit that in nature an infinite power of thinking is given which, insofar as it is infinite, contains objectively in itself all of Nature, the thoughts of which proceed in the same mode, together with Nature, evidently the ideatum²⁰ of [this power]. From there I posit that the human Mind is the same as this [power], not insofar as it is infinite and perceives all of nature, but finite, insofar as it truly perceives only the human body; and by this reasoning I posit that the human Mind is part of a certain infinite intellect.²¹

The *Ethica* itself maintains the same thesis about the "extended" status of thinking, but does not put it quite so directly. Spinoza spends the first third of Part I demonstrating that if an absolutely infinite substance (i.e. God) is admitted to exist (Ip11), then strictly speaking God should be the only substance that exists at all by way of, as it were, crowding out all the others (Ip14). And if God has an infinitude of attributes (Id6), then *thought* should be among them: "Thought is an attribute of God, or [sive] God is a thinking thing." And thus thought should *also* be infinite, at least in its kind: "…Thought is necessarily (by Part I, Definitions 4 and 6) one of the infinite attributes of God..."²² God, as a thinking thing, is infinite *within* the realm of thought. And the

²⁰ I leave the important term "ideatum" untranslated, since I would have to translate it as something like "that whereof there is an idea."

²¹ Opera IV, 173-4: "...[Mentem humanam] etiam partem Naturae esse censeo; nempe quia statuo, dari etiam in naturâ potentiam infinitam cogitandi, quae, quatenus infinita, in se continet totam Naturam objectivè, & cujus cogitationes procedunt eodem modo, ac Natura, ejus nimirùm ideatum. Deinde Mentem humanam hanc eandem potentiam statuo, non quatenus infinitam, & totam Naturam percipientem; sed finitam, nempe quatenus tantùm humanum Corpus percipit, & hâc ratione Mentem humanam partem cujusdam infiniti intellectûs statuo."
²² Ilp1 and p1s: "Cogitatio attributum Dei est, sive Deus est res cogitans." "...est necessario (per defin. 4. et 6. p. 1.) Cogitatio unum ex infinitis Dei attributes..." Interestingly, Spinoza does not *initially* use Id6 to prove this

consequence, as above, is that a human being – at least insofar as they are also considered as thinking things (IIa2) – must be "part of the infinite intellect of God." And so, once again: "[W]hen we say that the human mind perceives this or that, we say nothing other than that God, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is exhibited [explicatur] through the nature of the human mind or [sive] insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human mind, has this or that idea...²³ Human beings are indeed thinking things, i.e. minds, but only in a secondary and derivative sense. The human mind is first and foremost a *mode* of thought (IIp10c) and as such an *idea*, or more precisely constituted by idea: "And indeed, idea is what primarily constitutes the being of the human mind."²⁴ And this demotion of the human mind's status from a lofty Cartesian substantiality goes in hand with a promotion of every *other* individual to the very same rank of "mind," albeit often only in a quite rudimentary way:

For the matters which we have shown thus far are completely general and do not pertain more to humans than to the remaining individuals, which are all, although in different degrees, still animate. For an idea of anything whatsoever is necessarily given in God, of which God is the cause in the same mode [modo] as he is of the idea of the human body [i.e., the human mind]: and to the point that whatever we said of the idea of the human body must necessarily be said of the idea of anything whatsoever.²⁵

In the same way that the realm of extension (stretching everywhere without limit) is occupied by bodies, so the realm of thought is occupied by minds – or rather one properly substantial mind, of which all others are "a part." And minds are also properly ideas. *Everything that is* – everything that appears on the ontic registry, as it were – gets a manifestation in this realm of thought. If this or that *is*, then it *is* (at least in the realm of thought) as an idea.

proposition but rather Ip25c.

²³ IIp11c: "Hinc sequitur mentem humanam partem esse infiniti intellectus Dei; ac proinde cum dicimus mentem humanam hoc vel illud percipere, nihil aliud dicimus, quam quod Deus, non quatenus infinitus est, sed quatenus per naturam humanae mentis explicatur sive quatenus humanae mentis essentiam constituit, hanc vel illam habet ideam..."

²⁴ IIp11d: "Atque adeo idea primum est, quod humanae mentis esse constituit.."

²⁵ IIp13s: "Nam ea, quae hucusque ostendimus, admodum communia sunt nec magis ad homines quam ad reliqua individua pertinent, quae omnia, quamvis diversis gradibus, animata tamen sunt. Nam cujuscunque rei datur necessario in Deo idea, cujus Deus est causa eodem modo ac humani corporis ideae: atque adeo, quicquid de idea humani corporis diximus, id de cujuscunque rei idea necessario dicendum est."

Where this begins to get complicated is that these ideas are also, properly speaking, ideas *of* something. Each idea also has an ideatum – a "referent," to use an anachronism. And this properly introduces us into the puzzle of "parallelism." For Spinoza *is not* an idealist. He not only admits that there are bodies – certainly my own human body, just as I sense it (IIp13c) – but maintains (Ip15s) that corporeality or extension should be aspects of the divine nature. In other words, God – within the attribute of extension – is an infinite corporeal substance. As in IIp2: "Extension is an attribute of God, or [sive] God is an extended thing."²⁶ Thus we have at least *two sorts* of entity, ²⁷ namely bodies and ideas or minds. But this, in turn, invites one of the classic problems of the post-Cartesian period: given that there are these two sorts of entity, what relationship can they have to one another?

First, answering negatively: There is not any *causal* relation. Spinoza insists that "each

singular attribute of substance must be conceived through itself,"²⁸ eventually to the point that

"the body cannot determine the mind to think, nor can the mind determine the body to move, to

rest, or anything else (if there is anything else)."²⁹ The clearest and probably most important

proposition on the topic is IIp6, which reads:

Proposition 6. The modes of whichever attribute have God as a cause only insofar as he is considered under that attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as under any other. Demonstration. For each attribute is conceived through itself, without any other (by Proposition 10 of Part I). Whereby the modes of each attribute involve the concept of their attribute, but not of any other; so indeed (by Axiom 4 of Part I), they have God as a cause only insofar as he is considered under that attribute of which they are modes, and not insofar as under any other.³⁰

²⁶ "Extensio attributum Dei est, sive Deus est res extensa."

²⁷ And if we are to take seriously Spinoza's claim in ID6 that God is indeed "substantia constants infinitis attributis," substance persisting through infinite attributes, then presumably we should have far more than these mere two.
²⁸ IP10: "Unumquodque unius substantiae attributum per se concipi debet."

²⁹ IIIp2: "Nec corpus mentem ad cogitandum, nec mens corpus ad motum neque ad quietem, nec ad aliquid (si quid est) aliud determinare potest."

³⁰ "Propositio VI. Cujuscunque attributi modi Deum, quatenus tantum sub illo attributo, cujus modi sunt, et non, quatenus sub ullo alio consideratur, pro causa habent.

[&]quot;Demonstratio. Unumquodque enim attributum per se absque alio concipitur (per prop. 10. p. 1.). Quare uniuscujusque attributi modi conceptum sui attributi, non autem alterius involvunt; adeoque (per axiom. 4. p. 1.) Deum, quatenus tantum sub illo attributo, cujus modi sunt, et non, quatenus sub ullo alio consideratur, pro causa habent. Q.e.d."

Bodies can have no causal effect within the realm of thought, while ideas cannot effect extension. That is to say, Spinoza denies any causality between attributes. Della Rocca refers to this as the "conceptual or explanatory barrier" between the attributes,³¹ i.e. a kind of *causal exclusivity*. In each order, ideas must cause ideas and bodies bodies, without exception. So: if ideas and bodies can have no causal relationship, what remains?

The core of Spinoza's *positive* answer is generally taken to lie in IIp7. It reads:

The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things. Demonstration. This is clear from Axiom 4 of Part I ["The cognition of an effect depends on, and also involves, the cognition of the cause."]. For the idea of anything caused depends on the cognition of the cause of which it is the effect.³²

Even discounting the demonstration, almost every single word of this proposition is open to question. "The same" in what sense (what kind of identity is this)? Does "order" refer also to the *individuals* constituting this order, or to the mere order*ing* of the individuals? Why does Spinoza say "things" and not "bodies"? I shall take up some of these questions, as well as the nature of the demonstration, in the following section; for present purposes it is sufficient to get a broad, rough sketch.

Bennett glosses IIp7 to say: "This seems to be the doctrine that there is a one-one relation correlating mental items with physical ones, mapping similarities onto similarities and causal chains onto causal chains."³³ This means: for every entity in the realm of bodies enjoying a certain and absolutely necessary (Ip29) place in the extended causal chain, there is a matching entity in the realm of ideas with exactly the same place in the chain of thought. This can seem almost cartoonish at first glance, as if it were like this: that, were a cueball to hit a striped ball

³¹ See his discussion on parallelism and the "barrier" in *Representation and the Mind Body Problem in Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 9-17. This section basically grounds the rest of the book. ³² "Ordo et connexio idearum idem est ac ordo et connexio rerum.

[&]quot;Demonstratio. Patet ex axiom. 4. p. 1 ['Effectus cognitio a cognitione causae dependet et eandem involvit.']. Nam cujuscunque causati idea a cognitione causae, cujus est effectus, dependet."

³³ Jonathan Bennett, A Study of Spinoza's Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 127.

that then moved off to hit a solid, one would have to posit a series of *ideas* of such balls that also hit each other. But this is not quite right. In that case – we shall stick to it for the moment, since it is a relatively simple one – you do indeed have a correlation between the two orders, the billiard balls and the ideas of them, as follows:

$$\begin{array}{cccc} I1 & \rightarrow & I2 & \rightarrow & I3 \\ B1 & \rightarrow & B2 & \rightarrow & B3 \end{array}$$

But the point is not exactly that the ideas "hit" each other in the same way as the balls. To be sure, for Spinoza there are events in thought that exactly mirror those of the physical impacts, but those events cannot themselves be physical impacts. Rather, they should be – at minimum – the *cognition* of such impacts, the *cognition* thereby having its own (mental) effects. And the cognition of the ideas involved in this chain should exactly match the physical occurrences of the bodies in their own causal chain, to which the ideas refer. That is: there is no disconnect between the explanatory order of thought and the explanatory order of extension, or any other attribute (whatever it may be). Each must be kept *distinct*, as at the end of the IIp7 Scholium:

[S]o long as things are considered as modes of cognition, we must display [explicare] the order of the totality of nature, or [sive] the connection of causes, solely through the attribute of Thought, and insofar as they are considered as modes of Extension, likewise the order of the totality of nature must be displayed solely through the attribute of Extension, and I understand the same concerning the other attributes.³⁴

But precisely *as* distinct, the orders are perfectly mirrored; in each we find "easdem res invicem sequi" the very same things following one another.

For the sake of brevity I am obviously skirting a whole mass of interpretive controversies, but this in short seems to me to sketch a common reading as to "parallelism." As it stands at the moment, we are wont to wonder why Spinoza would ever have held to such a "drastically strong thesis" (Bennett), or even found it plausible at all. For the cosmos it describes

³⁴ "...quamdiu res ut cogitandi modi considerantur, ordinem totius naturae sive causarum connexionem per solum Cogitationis attributum explicare debemus, et quatenus ut modi Extensionis considerantur, ordo etiam totius naturae per solum Extensionis attributum explicari debet, et idem de aliis attributis intelligo."

is a hugely messy one, with an infinite number of sorts of entities (bodies, minds, and whatever else) lodged into an equally infinite number of causal chains, all running in their own necessitarian order and never intersecting one another. Worse vet, it seems to be an unnecessarily messy cosmos: each and every causal chain, when posited, does exactly the same *work*, describes exactly the same order of explanation in its own attribute. So, one asks an obvious question: if each attribute does indeed display the very same order of the totality of nature, why not simply give up on this fruitless and overcomplicated orchestration of attributes and various causal orders? Why not insist on only one attribute? Given the structure and goals of the *Ethica* (which hardly ever mentions bodies after IIp31), the obvious choice would be *thought*. The overwhelming emphasis of the text is on thought, especially later on, and all of the ethical conclusions which the text seems to be aiming at – remember that this is an *Ethics Demonstrated* in Geometrical Order, an ethics with a demonstrative basis - would follow just as well from a one-attribute, idealist position. Thus we may pose a question: why would Spinoza not embrace such an option, if it is a simpler alternative to the complex metaphysical situation which he posits?

I note in passing that Della Rocca has recently argued that Spinoza *does* reject this complex situation, although not quite in the way that I suggest he might have. Della Rocca:

...Spinoza explicitly embraces in Part II a monism of finite mental things and finite extended things that is analogous to the monism of extended substance and thinking substance that he embraces in Part I. While parallelism does imply some kind of dualism, it is not a dualism of extended things and thinking things, as in Descartes.³⁵

Instead:

...the dualism here is not, for Spinoza, a dualism of extended things and thinking things. Rather the dualism is a dualism of *ways of conceiving* or *explaining* the same thing.... The things themselves don't run on parallel tracks, for Spinoza, rather the ways of conceiving or explaining the things do.³⁶

³⁵ Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (London: Routledge, 2008), 100.

³⁶ ibid, 101-2. This position seems to me quite close to that of Wolfson's. Compare, e.g.: "When therefore Spinoza

I find this interpretation a bit too hasty in the interest of trying to be (perhaps unnecessarily) charitable. We should certainly accept that for Spinoza ideas and bodies, and even their orders, are "the same"; but the sense of this sameness is by no means obvious. Rendering it a strict identity, as Della Rocca wishes, seems to me to come with the cost of divorcing the attributes from the entities and shuffling them off merely into ways of how we (as it were) talk about entities. Even if this is done quite gently, it still strikes me as rather "un-Spinozist" in that it seems to make all of his attribute talk inapplicable to the "rerum natura." If Spinoza, of all philosophers, thought that the thought/extension distinction designated only ways of conceiving or explaining but were not *real* (in the strict sense), I imagine he would not have gone through the trouble – or would have at least further emphasized their perspectival nature. Thus, I must take this reading as simply trying to save Spinoza from a scenario which he seems hellbent on establishing. But: does he need saving? I myself think it is more instructive to take Spinoza at his word – that he did believe in the reality of thought, extension, and the other attributes – and to wonder why he insisted on all of them. For, far from *erroneously* pursuing an overcomplicated cosmos, it may be the case that he had a reason -i.e., that to some extent he remains beyond us.

A second, analogous case is that of *truth* and *adequacy*. The concept of truth is brought up early on in the *Ethica*, as Axiom 6 of Part I (*not*, importantly, as a definition). The axiom reads simply: "A true idea must agree with its ideatum."³⁷ We shall now take this to mean, quite conventionally: in order for an idea to be true, it must agree with the thing of which it is an idea,

says in Proposition VI that 'the modes of any attribute have God for a cause only in so far as He is considered under that attribute of which they are modes,' he does not mean to imply that the attributes and their modes exist as something really distinct in the essence of God; he only means that 'when things are *considered* as modes of thought, we must explain the order of the whole of nature or the connection of causes by the attribute of thought alone, and when things are *considered* as modes of extension, the order of the whole of nature must be explained through the attribute of extension alone, and so with the other attributes." Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza, Volume II* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 23-4.

³⁷ "Idea vera debet cum suo ideato convenire."

i.e., to which it purports to refer. That is: this axiom poses a *requirement upon ideas* that they

should match their ideata. For example, I may have an idea about how far away the sun is (cf

IIp35s), and my idea will be *true* only if the sun is precisely that very distance.

What remains strange is that for the vast majority of the *Ethica* Spinoza seems to actually

abandon truth in favor of another concept entirely, that of "adequacy."³⁸ Adequacy, unlike truth,

receives a proper definition (IId4), although bizarrely it is a chiefly negative one:

By adequate idea I understand an idea which, insofar as it is considered in itself without relation to the object, has all the properties or [sive] intrinsic denominations of a true idea. Explication. I say intrinsic in order to set off what is extrinsic, which is obviously the agreement of the idea with its ideatum.³⁹

Spinoza's intention in positing this new word seems to lie in bracketing away any requirement of

a true idea that it expand (as it were) into any realm outside of cognition. It is as if "adequate"

simply means "true" insofar as the sense of the term is entirely limited to the attribute of thought.

But what could the "intrinsic denominations" of truth (and hence adequacy) be, if not something

like the agreement with an ideatum?

Spinoza does not provide a direct answer. His best hints, however, are provided by his

description of *in*adequate ideas. So we return to IIp11c:

[W]hen we say that the human mind perceives this or that, we say nothing other than that God, not insofar as he is infinite, but insofar as he is exhibited through the nature of the human mind or [sive] insofar as he constitutes the essence of the human mind, has this or that idea; and when we say that God has this or that idea, not only insofar as he constitutes the nature of the human mind,

³⁸ The immediate source of this term (if not its entire meaning) seems to be *Descartes*, who makes use of it in the First, Second, and especially the Fourth *Replies*. AT VII 220: "...in order for any cognition to be *adequate*, it must contain within it all properties which are in the thing cognized; and on that account it is God alone who knows himself to have adequate cognitions of all things." ("...ut aliqua cognitio sit adaequata, debeant in ea contineri omnes proprietates quae sunt in re cognita; et idcirco solus est Deus qui novit se habere cognitiones rerum omnium adaequatas.") A created intellect may, *as a matter of fact*, come to possess adequate knowledge of other things – in some cases "easily." However, though we may gain such adequate ideas, we will never be able to *know* that we know if and when it happens. For Descartes, only God has the infinite power of thought necessary for this. This is therefore a fundamental division between divine and created cognition: we may be capable of having some ideas adequately, i.e. in a way that equals God, but even in those cases God will always exceed us because he *knows* when he has such adequacy while we do not.

³⁹ "Per ideam adaequatam intelligo ideam, quae, quatenus in se sine relatione ad objectum consideratur, omnes verae ideae proprietates sive denominationes intrinsecas habet.

[&]quot;Explicatio. Dico intrinsecas, ut illam secludam, quae extrinseca est, nempe convenientiam ideae cum suo ideato."

but insofar as he also simultaneously has the idea of another thing with the human mind, then we say that the human mind perceives the thing in part or [sive] inadequately.⁴⁰

My human mind is a finite idea. But there are *other* finite ideas with their own ideata within the space of thought, and my mind can perceive them in a certain sense (IIp14). But it does so only in an inadequate way – basically when the idea of my body (i.e., my mind), insofar as that body is affected by external bodies, ends up being "confused" with other ideas.⁴¹ This mutilation or confusion, however, is merely *relative* to the finite ideas which are thereby held together – in this case, relative to my own mind. This "relativity" of inadequacy eventually follows with the consequence that, *positively speaking*, there are no such things as inadequate or false ideas (IIp33): such ideas consist purely in a relative cognitive *privation* at the level of finite minds (IIp35; also cf IIp36d). Even so, if inadequacy consists only in a confusion or mutilation of ideas at the level of finite minds – a confusion which is constantly happening, which we can never fully escape from so long as we exist durationally⁴² – then it remains to be asked: what does the *adequacy* of an idea consist in?

Spinoza says: "All ideas, insofar as they are assigned [referuntur] to God, are true."⁴³ And again: "All ideas are in God (by Proposition 15 of Part I); and, insofar as assigned to God, are true (by Proposition 32 of this Part) and (by the Corollary to Proposition 7 of this Part) adequate."⁴⁴ Thus we may suppose, ignoring the question of the agreement with the ideata (which Spinoza insists upon in IId4), that an idea's being assigned to God is just what it means

⁴⁰ "...cum dicimus mentem humanam hoc vel illud percipere, nihil aliud dicimus, quam quod Deus, non quatenus infinitus est, sed quatenus per naturam humanae mentis explicatur sive quatenus humanae mentis essentiam constituit, hanc vel illam habet ideam; et cum dicimus Deum hanc vel illam ideam habere, non tantum quatenus naturam humanae mentis constituit, sed quatenus simul cum mente humana alterius rei etiam habet ideam, tum dicimus mentem humanam rem ex parte sive inadaequate percipere."

⁴¹ For a fuller account I refer to Della Rocca's *Representation and the Mind Body Problem in Spinoza*, 53ff.

⁴² See, e.g., the end of IIp35s. But also see almost all of the middle portion of Part II, from IIp14 to IIp31.

⁴³ IIp32: "Omnes ideae, quatenus ad Deum referuntur, verae sunt."

⁴⁴ IIp36d: "Ideae omnes in Deo sunt (per prop. 15. p. 1.); et, quatenus ad Deum referuntur sunt verae (per prop. 32. hujus) et (per coroll. prop. 7. hujus) adaequatae." What is fascinating in this demonstration, and to a lesser extent in IIp32d, is that Spinoza seems to take the adequacy of the divine ideas to hinge upon IIp7c – which does not directly mention adequacy.

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for it to be adequate. There is, however, the additional wrinkle that "...our mind, insofar as it perceives things truly, is part of the infinite intellect of God (by the Corollary to Proposition 11 of this Part); and to the point that it is as necessary that the clear and distinct ideas of the [human] mind be true as the ideas of god [be true, i.e. adequate]."⁴⁵ Adequacy describes not just *God's* thought, but also *human* thought insofar as it measures up to the divine intellect. An adequate idea, then, is an idea thought *exactly as in the divine intellect* – thought either by that intellect as such, or thought by the human mind (as part of that intellect) without confusion.

That human cognition is capable of adequacy (via the second and third kinds of knowledge – cf IIp40s2) turns out to be the hinge upon which the rest of the *Ethica* turns, particularly the conclusions of Part V.⁴⁶ But this far-reaching thesis, in turn, pushes us back upon another obvious question: why is there a distinction between truth and adequacy *at all*? For this distinction seems to make no difference: the terms are coextensive, to the point where Spinoza will often substitute one for the other. As a matter of theoretical economy, then, wouldn't he have been better served by simply eliminating one of the terms or combining them? If so, then presumably the term to keep (for the purposes of the rest of the text) would be adequacy. The fact that an adequate idea will turn out to agree with its ideatum seems to have no real upshot for the text – i.e., it seems not to be doing any *work* – while the fact that human beings can attain to certain ideas just as God does has tremendous consequences (in IIp1ff, in Vp4, in Vp39, etc.). The realm of the ideata can be ignored, if not eliminated altogether in a thoroughgoing idealist fashion. And practically speaking, Spinoza *does* in fact ignore the ideata for most of the text –

⁴⁵ IIp43s: "...mens nostra, quatenus res vere percipit, pars est infiniti Dei intellectus (per coroll. prop. 11. hujus); adeoque tam necesse est, ut mentis clarae et distinctae ideae verae sint, ac Dei ideae."

⁴⁶ On this point, also see Jean-Luc Marion's "*Aporias* and the Origins of Spinoza's Theory of Adequate Ideas" in *Spinoza on Knowledge and the Human Mind*, ed. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Leiden: Brill, 1994). E.g., pp. 149: "[T]he transcendental abyss between the finite and the infinite [is what] the *Ethics* [has] no other purpose than to fill up.... It seems that the Spinozist doctrine of the adequate idea attempts to accomplish on the strict 'level of reason' what would have been accomplished in the theological sphere through Grace and private revelation."

and yet, the distinction between truth and adequacy remains. Why?

Thus, we have two cases in which Spinoza might have been tempted in a broadly idealist direction for the purposes of theoretical economy: first in the instance of a complicated multilevel cosmos in which the same order of nature is expressed through different attributes, and second in the instance of the introduction of a term, "truth," which turns out to mean the very same as "adequacy" except with an additional and seemingly needless "extrinstic denomination." And yet, these apparently wasteful cases remain at work in Spinoza's system. For what reason? Is there something we've missed?

III. Why Spinoza Isn't an Idealist

Let's return to IIp7, this time spending a bit more time in its fine details; once again, this is the text which is supposed to establish the "parallelism" between ideas and things. The proposition itself reads: "The order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things." Its demonstration reads: "This is clear from Axiom 4 of Part I. For the idea of anything caused depends on the cognition of the cause of which it is the effect."

Regarding this argument, one may be forgiven for wondering if one has missed something: this is surprisingly stark as the proof for such a grand metaphysical scheme. Ia4 simply reads, "The cognition of an effect depends on, and also involves, the cognition of the cause"; it is used by Spinoza in a number of ways. At times (most clearly in IIp5, IIp16, and IIp45) he seems to intend it as establishing an explanatory order *within thought in particular*; in other moments (most glaringly IIp6) it is extended to other attributes. But even in a broad reading, can Ia4 possibly justify the entire apparatus described in IIp7s? It's hard to see how. Thus, commentators often see the demonstration as incomplete. Bennett and Della Rocca both speak of a "gap" between IIp7 and Ia4,⁴⁷ and both try to fill the gap in the same way. Bennett $\frac{1}{47} A Study of Spinoza's Ethics 129-30$, and *Spinoza* 91-2.

says, and Della Rocca will argue much the same:

These troubles result from assuming that 2p7 bears the whole burden of the parallelism doctrine. That is what commentators usually assume, and so did I for many years; but it is wrong. Really, it is 2p3 that asserts the existence of a mental item corresponding to every physical item; but it tells us nothing about the correspondence relation except that it justifies speaking of ideas 'of' things.

That is to say, they take the gap in the IIp7 proof as lying in the fact that Spinoza does not argue (within the proof) that any ideas exist to be parallel with the things in the first place. Hence, Spinoza should be invoking IIp3 ("In God, necessarily an idea is given of his essence as well as everything that necessarily follows from that essence").⁴⁸ But even this, I think, cannot be enough to give the commentators what they want. Bennett's point that the "parallelism doctrine" must extend beyond IIp7 seems to me both correct and incredibly important, but I also cannot see how his reach goes far enough. For even granting that a realm of ideas is given (IIp3), even granting (by Ia4) that a necessary explanatory order holds within that realm, how can Spinoza help himself to the "correspondence" – to the notion that ideas are "of" things in the way that Bennett wants? Even if IIp3 *uses* the language of "idea plus genitive", it is by no means *proved* there that any referential relation between an idea and a thing should hold. Thus, even if we accept (with the help of IIp3) that there are ideas as much as things, there is as yet no reason why the different causal orders should not go careening off in their own directions – each as necessitarian as the other, but with nothing matching up between them.

Is the demonstration of IIp7 genuinely incomplete, then? On its face, yes. Unless Spinoza *does not mean to prove* what we think he intends to prove; unless he sees the proposition, at least considered in itself, as making a far more minimal step than his commentators do.

Let us reconsider the context. It is possible to read IIp5, p6, and p7 as all spelling out consequences of Ia4, which they all invoke in their demonstrations. IIp5-6, making reference to

⁴⁸ "In Deo datur necessario idea, tam ejus essentiae quam omnium, quae ex ipsius essentia necessario sequuntur."

Ip10 as well ("Every attribute of the single substance must be conceived through itself"),⁴⁹ use Ia4 to establish the causal exclusivity within the attributes – and *particularly* within thought. (It is Spinoza's particular interest here to show that whatever causal order there is to cognition must not allow intrusion from other attributes.) However, something appears to have gone missing. IIp3 does indeed establish that there must be a whole myriad of ideas, finite and otherwise, just as Bennett needs. But it in no way establishes that there must be a *necessary causal order* to those ideas in the same way as Ip28 and Ip29 establish for things – Ip28 and Ip29, which themselves invoke Ia4 through Ip26 and Ip25. Thus, following the sidelining of any possible extra-mental interference in IIp5-6, what we *should* expect to find is a demonstration of just such a strict causal order within thought. And we do indeed find a proposition whose demonstration, invoking Ia4 once again, looks like it should do just that: "This is clear from Axiom 4 of Part I. For the idea of anything caused depends on the cognition of the cause of which it is the effect."

I am, of course, speaking of the very IIp7 that has given us so much trouble – and which I now propose is, at least on its own far more modest than it may appear. On this reading, we should take "the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things" not to aim its argument for the *sameness* of the two orders, but rather to claim (for the first time) that ideas should *have* a rigorous order just as the things do. Thus, that the ideas should exactly line up with the things is *not* demonstrated as such, but *assumed* on some as-yet-unknown basis. This also makes the Corollary follow much more smoothly, as if the strict order of thinking had indeed just been established: "From this it follows that God's power of thinking is equal to his power of actually acting. That is, everything which follows formally from the infinite nature of God follows objectively from the idea of God with the same order and the same connection."⁵⁰

⁴⁹ "Unumquodque unius substantiae attributum per se concipi debet."

⁵⁰ IIp7c: "Hinc sequitur, quod Dei cogitandi potentia aequalis est ipsius actuali agendi potentiae. Hoc est, quicquid ex infinita Dei natura sequitur formaliter, id omne ex Dei idea eodem ordine eademque connexione sequitur in Deo objective."

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Thus, Spinoza writes IIp7 as if the "parallelism" he describes in the scholium had already been

all but established, i.e. that ideas and things had already been connected somehow, and that the

only remaining move was to show an orderliness of ideas matching that of things. Granting this

so far, what hidden basis is he working from?

At the very start of his scholium, Spinoza hints as to his broader line of argument:

Here, before we may proceed further, we must recall to memory what we showed before; indeed, that everything which can be perceived by an infinite intellect as constituting the essence of the substance pertains only to a single substance, and consequently that thinking substance and extended substance are the same single substance, which is comprehended now under this attribute, now under that. So too, the mode of extension and the idea of that mode are the same single thing, but expressed in two modes...⁵¹

The reference here is not completely obvious. However, it seems to me that there is only a single

text in the *Ethica* which Spinoza can possibly intend. That is Ip30, which reads:

An intellect, whether finite in action or [aut] infinite in action, must comprehend the attributes of God and the affections of God, and nothing else.

Demonstration. A true idea must agree with its ideatum (by Axiom 6), that is (as is known through itself), that which is contained in the intellect objectively must necessarily be given in nature; but in nature (by Corollary 1 of Proposition 14) none but one substance is given, namely God, nor any other affections (by Proposition 15) than those which are in God and which (by the same Proposition) can neither be nor be conceived without God; therefore an intellect, whether finite in action or [aut] infinite in action must comprehend the attributes of God and the affections of God and nothing else. Q.e.d.⁵²

Ip30 is by no means an obviously important structural point in the text; it is only directly cited

once, in IIp4 (immediately prior to the causal exclusivity propositions). Nevertheless, if Spinoza

refers to it in the IIp7 scholium – albeit having rewritten "Dei attributa" with "substantiae

⁵¹ IIp7s: "Hic, antequam ulterius pergamus, revocandum nobis in memoriam est id, quod supra ostendimus; nempe, quod quicquid ab infinito intellectu percipi potest, tanquam substantiae essentiam constituens, id omne ad unicam tantum substantiam pertinet, et consequenter quod substantia cogitans et substantia extensa una eademque est substantia, quae jam sub hoc, jam sub illo attributo comprehenditur. Sic etiam modus Extensionis et idea illius modi una eademque est res, sed duobus modis expressa…"

⁵² "Intellectus, actu finitus aut actu infinitus, Dei attributa Deique affectiones comprehendere debet et nihil aliud. "Demonstratio. Idea vera debet convenire cum suo ideato (per axiom. 6.), hoc est (ut per se notum), id, quod in intellectu objective continetur, debet necessario in natura dari; atqui in natura (per coroll. 1. prop. 14.) non nisi una substantia datur, nempe Deus, nec ullae aliae affectiones (per prop. 15.) quam quae in Deo sunt et quae (per eandem prop.) sine Deo nec esse nec concipi possunt; ergo intellectus, actu finitus aut actu infinitus, Dei attributa Deique affectiones comprehendere debet et nihil aliud. Q.e.d." I note that it was Yitzhak Melamed who, as I recall, first suggested a connection between Ip30 and IIp7 a number of years ago, although I cannot remember the context.

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essentiam constituens," which makes no difference given Id4 – then he must read it as establishing something important. Initially it appears to play a purely negative role, i.e., that Spinoza is merely heading off the possibility that God or a finite mind may think of something exterior to the single substance. But IIp7s implies much, much more: Spinoza appears to think that Ip30 goes so far as to establish that thinking and extended substance are "the same," that ideas and bodies are "the same." That is to say: Spinoza seems to think that it is *this* proposition, and not IIp7 itself, that establishes the core of the relation between ideas and things (and with it his "parallelism"). For Spinoza himself, the "sameness" from IIp7 that so concerns Della Rocca and Wolfson is first founded here, along with the "of" (i.e., the "correspondence" between ideas and bodies) which Bennett sees implied by IIp3. How can such an innocuous-looking proposition shoulder such a huge metaphysical burden? How can Spinoza believe that the mere "comprehension" of the attributes of God by the intellect makes the substances under those attributes "the same," make the affections (i.e., modes) under those attributes "the same"?

Ip30d draws upon Ia6, Ip14c1, and Ip15 – truth, the unity of God, and the inherence of all things in God. The latter two do not seem enough to imply the conclusions Spinoza needs. But what about the Axiom? Previously the term "truth" seemed rather unnecessary and redundant – but perhaps that view is incorrect. Once again, Ia6 reads: "A true idea must agree with its ideatum." We took this to mean that it was a *requirement* upon ideas, if they were to be true, that they need to match the things to which they refer. But this is not at all how the Axiom is glossed in Ip30d, which instead says: "...that which is contained in the intellect objectively must necessarily be given in nature." Which is to say, we have been reading the Axiom completely upside down. It is not a requirement upon ideas that they must agree with the things to be true, then the ideas and things must agree. Ideas are "of" things

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because they are *true*; there must be things because the ideas *refer* to them. This is even confirmed earlier in Part I, where Spinoza writes in slightly vaguer but even more striking terms:

If intellect pertains to the divine nature, it will not be able by nature to be, like our intellect, posterior or (as the multitude opines) simultaneous with the things understood, since God is prior in causality to all things (by Corollary 1 of Proposition 16); to the contrary, the truth and the formal essence of things are such for this reason [ideo], because [quia] such exists objectively in the intellect of God.⁵³

This is all imply: Spinoza cannot be an idealist because ideas, for him, must be true in this sense.

Thus the core of Spinoza's "parallelism," to the reader's likely shock, turns out to be his very special understanding of truth: far from being redundant, its "extrinsic denomination" in fact establishs the basis for the metaphysical relation between the attributes. The "sameness" relating thinking and extended substances and modes could therefore be described as a kind of *veritative* identity. What makes idea and thing "the same" is truth: the thing *is* exactly the same as it *is* conceived in the divine mind, and could be no different. The work of IIp7 is therefore simply to establish that the *causal order and connection* of things and ideas are equally the same, which is a comparatively small step.⁵⁴

If I have spent so long in establishing this conclusion, it is only to highlight not merely that Spinoza makes use of truth in a way fundamental to his metaphysics but also the *strangeness* of his use. I am not aware of any deployment of the term which is completely comparable. Thomas Aquinas, for example, will indeed insist that "truth" is said in the primary and proper meaning when applied to the divine intellect, and that existing things *are* (and are *true*) in virtue of their being thought and produced (truly) by this intellect. Thus, e.g.:

But that truth said concerning [things] in relation to the divine intellect is inseparably ⁵³ Ip17s: "Si intellectus ad divinam naturam pertinet, non poterit uti noster intellectus posterior (ut plerisque placet) vel simul natura esse cum rebus intellectis, quandoquidem Deus omnibus rebus prior est causalitate (per coroll. 1. prop. 16.); sed contra, veritas et formalis rerum essentia ideo talis est, quia talis in Dei intellectu existit objective." ⁵⁴ One serious difficulty that I see with my reading is that it cannot account for the fact that human beings only have access to the attributes of thought and extension (IIa5; also cf Letter 64), although presumably thought should also have a truth relation to items in the other attributes. But I also know of no other view that does better with this problem of attribute limitation. communicated to them: as they cannot subsist except by the divine intellect [continually] producing them in being. And as before, truth is in things in relation to the divine intellect [more] than the human one, as it is compared to the divine intellect as to a cause, but to the human one (in a certain way) as to an effect, inasmuch as the [human] intellect receives knowledge from the things.... If therefore truth is taken in its proper meaning according to which all are primarily true, so all are true through a single truth, obviously through the truth of the divine intellect...⁵⁵

Thus in Aquinas, like Spinoza, created things are (and are true) due to their having been produced by the divine intellect; God's mind does not need to attain to "agreement" with the things, rather the things must "agree" with that mind if they are to be. But he still does not go so far as Spinoza. For Aquinas the relationship between the divine mind and the things remains a primarily *causal* one, albeit a causality that communicates truth. Not so for Spinoza: as there can be no causal rapport between minds and things, the link is purely *veritative* or even *intentional*. Nor indeed would Aquinas ever establish a causal order in the divine intellect to match that in the extended world, i.e. in the divine body (another Thomistic impossibility). And all of this, needless to say, is leagues away from anything to be found in contemporary thought. We are left, then, with a completely unique concept of truth, one (again, so far as I know) never duplicated outside of Spinoza. But it nevertheless maintains an intriguing *relationship* to many other concepts, stretching back from Parmenides and forward to Tarski. And perhaps in the future this relationship, and others like it, may be analyzed in a serious way.

IV. Concluding Remarks

I should speak for a bit about why any of this should *matter*. For even if the reader, setting aside all hermeneutical doubts, is willing to accept that Spinoza has such a novel concept of truth and that it plays such a direct role in his metaphysics, they may well still ask why I

⁵⁵ De veritate, Q.1 A.4 co.: "Sed veritas quae de [rebus] dicitur in comparatione ad intellectum divinum eis inseparabiliter communicatur: cum nec subsistere possint nisi per intellectum divinum eas in esse producentem. Per prius etiam inest rei veritas in comparatione ad intellectum divinum quam humanum, cum ad intellectum divinum comparetur sicut ad causam, ad humanum autem quodam modo sicut ad effectum, in quantum intellectus scientiam a rebus accipit.... Si ergo accipiatur veritas proprie dicta secundum quam sunt omnia principaliter vera, sic omnia sunt vera una veritate, scilicet veritate intellectus divini..."

consider this *philosophically*, rather than merely *philologically*, interesting.

To answer crudely, it is because I find contemporary philosophy's conceptual landscape regarding truth to be worrvingly impoverished. Considerations of truth now seem to come down to a choice between five theories whose natures and limits are not entirely clear, plus numerous variations and mixes between them. Truth is the correspondence between a belief and a fact. Or, truth is the rounded, systematic coherence of our beliefs as a whole. Or, truth is something we momentarily accept in a belief when that belief "works" for our present purposes. Or, truth is something like an asymptotic limit-concept which our knowledge-claims must continually approach if never achieve. Or, at the limit, truth marks a redundant predicate-concept which may be massaged out of the language by way of Tarski or something similar (e.g., "Obama is the 44th President' is true' can simply be rendered into "Obama is the 44th President"). All of these accounts of "truth" have been criticized in various ways, but mostly on a rather incidental basis without further analysis of the conceptual range of the word. And particularly not historicallyinformed analysis. Indeed, one often acts as if these discourses - excepting perhaps the last - fell from on high long ago, that they sat around fully-formed until their adoption by Russell, Joachim, James, and Cohen, and that what is available now exhausts all possible discussion. Most of this also assumes that truth should properly lie in something like propositional (or at least sentential) truth-value, an assumption which also goes unanalyzed.

I do not limit my criticism to the west side of the channel. A similar poverty is to be found, surprisingly, in the philosopher who seems to have spent more time and effort on the concept of truth than anyone else in the last century, namely *Heidegger*. "Truth" is central to all his work from the early 1920s onwards and, whatever one may say about his often questionable etymologies, to my mind he still does far more justice to the term's conceptual transformations

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than any other writer. But even he still oversimplifies matters, even he does not go deeply enough into the tiny, fine-grained developments. Heidegger has three concepts of truth⁵⁶ on offer, each with its own legitimacy: we may call his own concept *ontological* truth, the disclosedness (Erschlossenheit) of the fundamental structures of "being-in-the-world" as such; there is also *ontic* truth, the discoveredness (Entdecktheit) of entities as the entities they are; and finally there is *logical* truth, the agreement (Übereinstimmung) between an assertion and its object or, more broadly – and often he must take it *very* broadly – between thought and thing.⁵⁷ Heidegger believes he is the first to posit the ontological concept (with some anticipation from Husserl), but finds the others to have a long history. Ontic truth - that entities are what is true - he attributes to the Greeks, although he may as well have found examples in ordinary English ("Smith is a true friend" does not first of all mean "Smith is a friend' is a true statement," although this is a consequence; it means that Smith is a friend, really, that there is no mistaking the sort of entity that Smith is). The logical concept he sees as derivative of, and dependent upon, the ontic one. And it is this *logical* concept that, for Heidegger, reigns as the dominant one in the history of thought since Aristotle. Thus he must interpret everyone from the Academics to the neo-Kantians as somehow claiming this very same concept. Which seems to me a gross oversimplification; indeed, it is one which Heidegger would rightly have condemned in another writer.

When it comes to "truth," there may indeed be an unbroken path of conceptual development stretching from the early Greeks to the present hour. On the other hand, the texts dotting that path show that it is by no means as straight as Heidegger wishes. There are wild curves and switchback turns, even moments that seem to break off to nowhere. But then, suppose

⁵⁶ Or four, if one counts a later Nietzschean/pragmatist notion; see, e.g., the fifth chapter of his *Der Wille zur Macht als Erkenntnis* in *Nietzsche I, Gesamtausgabe 6.1* (Klostermann: Frankfurt am Main, 1996), translated in *Nietzsche, Volumes Three and Four*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

⁵⁷ For the classical discussion of these concepts (albeit without my names for them), see *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1979), §7.B and especially §44.

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it could become a philosophical task to map out, as it were, the *semantic topography* of a term like "truth" – to see where various internal conceptual possibilities relate, to show how the meaning does and can transform itself, to identify its limits (if there are any), and perhaps even to discover new options within it. In that case, it is precisely these messier portions of the historical road which might give one the best sense as to the *breadth of meaning* in the term, the sheer range of possible motion. In that case, historical philosophical analysis is invaluable.

I do not wish to "adopt" Spinoza's concept of truth and all that it implies; I would not argue for it, nor against it. But as a *historico-philosophical phenomenon* it provides us a glimpse into options within our own tradition which may otherwise have remained concealed. Nor is it the only example thereof. For it seems to me that in the seventeenth century in particular the concept of truth became, for a while, rather unstable and (as such) quite diverse. In Locke or Leibniz one finds concepts of truth which are quite recognizable, but also deeply novel to modern eyes –moreso when considered in the context of the systems the authors construct. Even Malebranche's notion of truth, comparatively unadventurous, has a number of remarkable aspects. And above all there are the reflections of Descartes, which begin in the *Regulae* and reach a kind of zenith in the Fourth *Meditation*.

The greatest danger to philosophy is a kind of *conceptual solipsism*. When one assumes that all possible theoretical schemes have been accounted for and what remains is to argue (on the basis of "natural intuitions" or somesuch) over which is most plausible, development is no longer possible. But the *interrogation* of the terms underlying such theories might open up a path to radically new results – even when such interrogation takes the form of examining the past.

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