

# Cudworth as a Critic of Spinoza<sup>1</sup>

Stewart Duncan

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## 1. Introduction

In the *True Intellectual System*, Cudworth attacks types of atheist position—atomic atheism, hylozoic atheism, etc. He generally uses ancient examples to illustrate those types, but also criticizes some of his contemporaries. We can identify direct criticisms of contemporaries by finding quotations, paraphrases, and accounts of their views in the text.<sup>2</sup> Cudworth’s criticism of Hobbes is relatively easy to see in that way, but it’s less obvious what he thought about Spinoza, the other infamous so-called atheist of the age. Cudworth does not quote and engage with Spinoza to nearly the same extent he does with Hobbes. Still, some readers have thought Spinoza was an important target of Cudworth’s.

That brings me to my primary question in this paper: how much of the *True Intellectual System* is directly about or aimed at Spinoza?

Looking at the existing literature, we find two main views, as well as a typical collection of intermediate and qualified positions. Some authors think Spinoza is a significant figure in the background of the *True Intellectual System*. Passmore, for example, wrote that he suspected that Spinoza “played quite an important role in determining the structure of the *True Intellectual System*” (Passmore 1990, 5). Opposing that, we find the suggestion that Cudworth’s discussions of hylozoic atheism, which have been alleged to be about Spinoza, are really aimed at Cudworth’s Cambridge colleague Francis Glisson.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper, I begin by looking at evidence about how much Cudworth knew about Spinoza, or was thinking about him, when writing the *True Intellectual System*. I first look at Cudworth’s few explicit references to Spinoza, then consider possible sources of his knowledge about Spinoza, such as it was. I then continue the discussion of sources by looking at Henry More’s work on the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*.

After that I turn my attention to the *True Intellectual System* itself, where there are relevant discussions in chapters 3 and 5. Looking at them, I focus on my primary question, about

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<sup>1</sup> I thank the audience of a conference on Cudworth at the University of Toronto for very helpful discussion of these issues.

<sup>2</sup> I have written about Cudworth’s direct criticisms of Hobbes (Duncan 2021; Duncan 2022, 56–64) and there are other such targets of criticism, including Gassendi (TIS 462, 641, 697, 769; Duncan and LoLordo forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> Colie (1963) includes Cudworth in her survey of early English reactions to Spinoza. More recently, Israel (2006, 446–9) sees Cudworth as a critic of Spinoza, as with varying degrees of assertiveness do Hutton (1984, 190), Assmann (1997, 80), Mihai (2020), and Thomson (2008, 53)—who also, however, sees Glisson as a target (Thomson 2008, 77). Henry (1987) and Giglioni (2002) argue for Glisson being one of Cudworth’s targets. Levitin (2015, 419–22) argues that Cudworth was not focused on Spinoza, and that Glisson “was the key contemporary target”, but that Cudworth’s “driving motive was historiographical rather than contemporary–polemical” (2015, 420). On these issues see also Breteau (2006).

the extent to which discussions were aimed at Spinoza, but I do also consider briefly whether some arguments are aimed at Glisson.

## 2. How much did Cudworth know about Spinoza?

### 2.1 Chronology and caution

There are some basic chronological reasons to be cautious in talking about Cudworth's engagement with Spinoza.

Spinoza's book on Descartes's *Principles* was published in 1663. At some point—I don't know when—Cudworth acquired a copy of this, which shows up in the posthumous catalogue of his library (Millington 1691, 29). In 1670 Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* was published. Meanwhile, Cudworth had been working on the *True Intellectual System*. The *imprimatur* of that work is dated 1671, even though the book was not published until 1678 (Burden n.d.). In 1677 Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma*, including the *Ethics*, were published.<sup>4</sup>

Cudworth's book was published only a year after Spinoza's *Ethics*, and was apparently largely written by 1671, six years before the publication of the *Ethics*, and only one after the publication of the TTP. Meanwhile, Spinoza's metaphysical system is not easy to discern from the earlier work on Descartes or the TTP. Given all that, I wonder if there ever was a time when Cudworth was working on the *True Intellectual System* and knew enough about Spinoza's views (in particular his metaphysical views) to be criticizing them.

### 2.2 Two explicit references to the TTP

There are two explicit references to the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* in the *True Intellectual System*. At one point, Cudworth quotes chapter 19 of the TTP (Cudworth 1678, 656). Here Cudworth is discussing the view that religion is the product of human politicians. In doing so, he quotes Hobbes's distinction between religion and superstition, where the key difference is that religion is publicly allowed. Cudworth moves on to say this:

And that Religion thus Nursed up by Politicians, might be every way Compliant with, and Obsequious to their Designs, and no way Refractory to the same; it hath been their great care to perswade the People, that their Laws were not meerly their own Inventions, but that themselves were only the *Interpreters of the Gods therein*, and *that the same things were really displeasing to the Gods, which were forbidden by them: God ruling over the world no otherwise than in them, as his Vicegerents*; according to that Assertion of a *Late Writer, Deum nullum Regnum in homines*

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<sup>4</sup> Those chronological issues are potentially complicated by speculation that Cudworth had access to a manuscript of the TTP (Simonutti 1995, 134) or even the *Ethics* (Mihai 2020, 206). But there seems to be no positive reason to believe this in either case.

*habere, nisi per eos qui Imperium tenent, that God Reigneth over men, only in the Civil Sovereigns* (TIS 655–6).

In the margin next to the quote from the “Late Writer” is a note saying “*Tract. Theol. Polit.*”, and the Latin above is indeed a quote from chapter 19 of that work. Cudworth then moves on, however, not to criticize Spinoza, but to provide more sources for the view that religion is the product of politicians, in the work of Lucretius, Cicero, and Plato. Thus we see Cudworth appearing to have some knowledge of Spinoza’s TTP, but we don’t see detailed philosophical engagement with Spinoza’s view.

A little later, Cudworth refers to chapter 6 of the TTP, on miracles (Cudworth 1678, 707). Cudworth distinguishes between two sorts of miracles: a first sort that could “be done, God Permitting only, by the *Ordinary and Natural Power* of other *Invisible Created Spirits, Angels or Demons*” (TIS 706), and a second, which miracles are “above the *Power* of all *Second Causes, or any Natural Created Being* whatsoever, and so can be attributed to none, but *God Almighty* himself” (TIS 707). Having drawn that distinction, Cudworth then comments briefly on Spinoza.

As for that late *Theological Politician*, who writing against *Miracles*, denies as well those of the Former, as of this Latter Kind, contending that a Miracle is nothing but a Name, which the Ignorant Vulgar gives, to *Opus Naturae Insolitum, any Unwonted work of Nature, or to what themselves can assign no Cause off*; as also that if there were any such thing done, *Contrary to Nature or Above it*, it would rather Weaken than Confirm, Our Belief of the Divine Existence; We find his Discourse every way so Weak, Groundless, and Inconsiderable; that we could not think it here to deserve a Confutation (TIS 707).

Here again we find awareness of Spinoza, and a view about Spinoza, but nothing we could call detailed engagement with Spinoza’s arguments.<sup>5</sup>

## 2.2 Spinoza as hylozoic atheist?

Those two direct references don’t add up to much, but those who think that Cudworth was engaging with Spinoza typically have one or two other passages of the *True Intellectual System* in mind. The first is this paragraph from the Preface.

In the *Third Chapter*, we thought it necessary, in order to a fuller Confutation of *Atheism*, to consider all the other *Forms* thereof, besides the *Atomick*. And here do we first of all, make a Discovery of a certain *Form* of *Atheism*, never before taken notice of, by any *Modern Writers*, which we call the *Hylozoick*: which notwithstanding, though it were long since started by *Strato*, in way of Opposition to the *Democritick* and *Epicurean Hypothesis*; yet because it afterwards slept in perfect Silence and

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<sup>5</sup> It’s also worth noting that Spinoza is twice called a “late” writer, so some of this must have been written no earlier than 1677—albeit one could go back and add ‘late’ to a previously written text.

Oblivion, should have been here by us passed by Silently; had we not had certain Knowledge of its being of late *Awakened* and *Revived*, by some, who were so sagacious, as plainly to perceive, that the *Atomick Form* could never doe their business, nor prove *Defensible*: and therefore would attempt to carry on this *Cause of Atheism*, in quite a different way, by the *Life and Perception of Matter*: as also that this in all probability, would ere long publickly appear upon the Stage, though not Bare-faced, but under a Disguize (TIS, Preface to the Reader, 9<sup>th</sup> unnumbered page).

There is, in Cudworth's classification of types of atheism, such a thing as hylozoic atheism, which involves a view of the "*Life and Perception of Matter*". This has, according to Cudworth, recently been revived, so that it "in all probability, would ere long publickly appear upon the Stage, though not Bare-faced, but under a Disguize". One might suggest that he has Spinoza in mind here.<sup>6</sup> But does he?

To help think about this, we should look at two related passages. The first is a passage from chapter 3 of the *True Intellectual System*, with a similar theme to the above passage in the Preface.

Now that *Life and Perception or Understanding*, should be *Essential to Matter* as such, or that all *Sensless Matter* should be *Perfectly and Infallibly wise* (though without Consciousness) as to all its own Congruities and Capabilities, which is the Doctrine of the *Hylozoists*; This I say, is an *Hypothesis* so Prodigiously Paradoxical, and so Outragiously Wild, as that very few men ever could have Atheistick Faith enough, to swallow it down and digest it. Wherefore this *Hylozoick Atheism* hath been very obscure ever since its first Emersion, and hath found so few Fautors and Abettors, that it hath look'd like a forlorn and deserted thing. Neither indeed are there any Publick Monuments at all extant, in which it is avowedly Maintained, Stated and Reduced into any System. Insomuch that we should not have taken any notice of it at this time, as a Particular *Form of Atheism*, nor have Conjured it up out of its Grave, had we not Understood, that *Strato's Ghost* had begun *to walk* of late, and that among some Well-wishers to Atheism, despairing in a manner of the *Atomick Form*, this *Hylozoick Hypothesis*, began already to be look'd upon, as the Rising Sun of Atheism,—*Et tanquam Spes altera Trojae*, it seeming to smile upon them, and flatter them at a distance, with some fairer hopes of supporting that Ruinous and Desperate Cause (TIS 145).<sup>7</sup>

Here again we have the suggestion that some people have been trying to revive hylozoic atheism, and the suggestion that those anonymous atheists have seen that atomic or

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<sup>6</sup> This suggests Cudworth expects some significant expression of hylozoic atheism to be published in the future. But without knowing when exactly Cudworth wrote this, that is not terribly helpful to us as we seek to identify targets of his criticism. It could even be a reference to Glisson's 1672 book, if this bit of the text was ready in 1671.

<sup>7</sup> [I'm puzzling over the origin of '*spes altera Trojae*'. Virgil, *Aeneid* 12.168 has '*spes altera Romae*'. Seneca, *Troades*, 741 has '*nullas habet spes Troia*'. Israel (2006, 448) quotes this without helping with the identification.]

Epicurean atheisms won't work, and have sought out some other approach to serve their atheistic goals.<sup>8</sup> As with the earlier passage, we do not have an explicit connection to Spinoza: neither he nor his works are named, and he is not quoted.

That lack of explicit connection matters, as it is not clear either that Spinoza is a hylozoic atheist, or that Cudworth read him in that way. Several of Spinoza's early modern English critics seem to read him as something more like a Hobbesian materialist.<sup>9</sup> But there is another relevant text, albeit not one from the published *True Intellectual System*.

In one of Cudworth's manuscripts, he says this.

Nor indeed is this Liberty of Will onely inconsistent w<sup>th</sup> that Democritick Atheism, but alsoe w<sup>th</sup> all other Forms thereof, they agreeing in this, that they derive all things from inanimate Matter, necessarily moving & acting; insomuch that Spinoza himselfe, who at last discarding Hobbianism, was transformed into a kind of Hylozoick Atheism, he Atributeing Life to all Matter, explodes [liberty of will], as an Impossibility, and contends for Universall Necessity.<sup>10</sup>

This undated note is the key text in which Cudworth says that he thinks Spinoza is a hylozoic atheist.

There's also an intriguing hint of a developmental story about Spinoza here, on which he began as a Hobbesian and became a hylozoic atheist. The suggestion is that it's not just that Spinoza noticed that other people's atomic atheism would not work, and thus became a hylozoic atheist, but that he personally started as a Hobbesian of some sort (so perhaps in Cudworth's terms an atomic atheist) before changing his approach.

We see then that Cudworth knew some things about Spinoza. He thought Spinoza was wrong about miracles, about the relationship between religion and politicians, and about liberty and necessity. And he thought (at some point) that Spinoza was a hylozoic atheist.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Some people, or maybe just some one person. Cudworth talks about his targets in the plural. But he did that on occasion when talking about individuals—see the discussion of Margaret Cavendish and her view about the three degrees of matter (TIS 137–8).

<sup>9</sup> Among slightly later authors see Clarke (1998, 36–8) and Carroll (1706). But see also the discussion of More below.

<sup>10</sup> As Passmore notes, referring to this text, “In one of his manuscripts Cudworth refers to Spinoza as ‘a kind of hylozoic atheist.’” (Passmore 1990, 6). I am grateful to the editors of the online *Cambridge Platonism Sourcebook*, who provide a transcript of this document (of about 8,500 words), which they title “The True Intellectual System of the Universe: The Second Part (complete text) [British Library Additional MS 4982(2)] (c.1671)”. I am not aware of why the authors date this to 1671, and the fact that Cudworth is offering a story about Spinoza's philosophical development beyond mechanist materialism makes that year surprisingly early.

<sup>11</sup> I do not discuss the idea that Cudworth thought of Spinoza as a Stoic atheist (rather than, or as well as, a hylozoic one). That seems to be suggested by Giglioni (2008, 328–9) and Brooke (2012, 136–7). See the comments of Levitin (2015, 422). Some early moderns—Leibniz for one—think of Spinoza as a sort of Stoic, but Cudworth seems not to do so.

It's that last point that is key. If Cudworth had Spinoza in mind, when he said that someone was going to present a disguised hylozoic atheism, then the discussions of hylozoic atheism in the *True Intellectual System* were to some extent targeted at Spinoza, at least as an example of a type. But we might still suspect (especially given the chronology) that Cudworth did not know very much about Spinoza's views while writing the *True Intellectual System*. To approach that issue from another angle, in the next section I investigate how and where Cudworth learned about Spinoza.

### 3. How did Cudworth learn about Spinoza?

To get the biggest thing out of the way first: it is not plausible that Cudworth read Spinoza's *Ethics* before writing the *True Intellectual System*. Though Cudworth may have worked on the *True Intellectual System* after 1671, the timing makes it unlikely that he read and reacted to the *Ethics* in the 1678 publication, when the *Ethics* was only published in 1677. The same applies to other material in Spinoza's *Opera Posthuma*. Similarly, it is unlikely that Cudworth's reaction was based on some critique of the *Ethics* that he knew, such as Henry More's, which was written in 1678.<sup>12</sup> There are also no direct references to the *Ethics* in the *True Intellectual System*. Given all this, I put aside here the thought that Cudworth might have, before finishing the *True Intellectual System*, learned about Spinoza and his alleged hylozoic atheism by reading the *Ethics*.<sup>13</sup>

Still, might Cudworth have learned about Spinoza, in particular about his metaphysics, from other published work? There are two candidates: the TTP and the book on Descartes's *Principles*.

Spinoza's book on Descartes's *Principles* was published in Amsterdam in 1663. We know that Cudworth eventually owned a copy of it.<sup>14</sup> I am not aware of any evidence as to when Cudworth acquired this, or indeed whether he read it. Still, as Passmore remarks, it was "the only work of Spinoza's Cudworth would have had any opportunity of reading at his leisure" (Passmore 1990, 6) before or while writing the *True Intellectual System*. Moreover,

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<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, Henry More engaged in detail with, and wrote against, the TTP in 1677 and the *Ethics* in 1678 (More 1679, xii).

<sup>13</sup> Mihai argues otherwise, alleging that Cudworth, when he uses the phrase "*ignorantiae asylum*", takes it from the appendix to part 1 of Spinoza's *Ethics* (Mihai 2020, 206–7). Cudworth does use the phrase (TIS 654–5; 655; cf. 668), but not in Spinoza's way, where people are described as seeking refuge in explanations in terms of God's will. Moreover, the phrase is not distinctively associated with Spinoza. For example, we find the phrase "*Miraculum (saith one) est ignorantiae asylum*" in John Wilkins' 1638 *The Discovery of a World in the Moone*. Wilkins himself says he is using a previous (unnamed) philosopher's description of miracles. "*Ignorantiae asylum*" is also used by Athanasius Kircher (1667, 6), in discussing occult qualities (Fleming 2011, 72–3). Mihai's suggestion that Cudworth might have had access to a manuscript of Spinoza's *Ethics* (Mihai 2020, 206) also seems implausible, as circulation of that text was highly restricted (Nadler 2006, 29; Steenbakkens 2009, 30).

<sup>14</sup> "*Principia Cartesiana more Geometrico demonstrata per Spinosam* — Amst. 1663" appears in the library sale catalogue of Millington (1691, 29).

this book had Spinoza's name on the title page—in this case, unlike others, there was no doubt about authorship.

There is however a basic difficulty in discovering Spinoza's views by reading his book on Descartes—the book is about Descartes. Something slightly different is the case with the “Appendix Containing Metaphysical Thoughts” (*Cogitata Metaphysica*, thus ‘CM’), which one might think are presented as Spinoza's thoughts, even though they are written in the voice of a teacher.<sup>15</sup> The text does seem to express some views that are not Descartes's, views which we might connect to those in the *Ethics*.<sup>16</sup> But it is not at all clear how the Spinozistic metaphysical views one might find there relate to the view Cudworth criticized as hylozoic atheism.

That brings me to the TTP. Spinoza knew something about this, as he quoted it twice. But how much did he know about it, and when? It turns out, as we will see below, that one of the passages Cudworth quotes from the TTP is also quoted by More in his “*Epistola altera*”. More also points to the other passage Cudworth quotes, though he does not precisely quote it. So we know that that Cudworth at least looked up one quotation in the TTP, to quote in full a passage More hadn't quoted fully. But we don't know that Cudworth knew the book well.<sup>17</sup> There are also questions, much as with the “Metaphysical Thoughts”, of how easily one can discern Spinoza's metaphysical views from the text, and of what the metaphysical views one might find there have to do with hylozoic atheism.<sup>18</sup> I will approach those questions in section 4, by thinking about what metaphysical views More discerned in the TTP. That won't tell us what Cudworth believed, but it will give us a useful starting point.

Before turning to More, I should consider one more option. Perhaps, as some have claimed, Cudworth learned about Spinoza's views from correspondence. Thus, Jonathan Israel says that “This danger was something to which Cudworth and his ally Henry More were alerted in the early 1670s by van Limborch, and which grew following the perceptible impact of Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* in Cambridge in the mid 1670s, the years immediately prior to the appearance of Cudworth's *magnum opus*” (Israel 2006, 446). One can trace such claims back at least as far as Colie (1957).

The best discussion of the early English reactions to the TTP is Simonutti (1995). There she discusses van Limborch corresponding in 1671 with Oliver Doiley, a fellow of King's College

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<sup>15</sup> In his preface to the book, Lodewijk Meyer says “we have attached, as an Appendix, our Author's *Metaphysical Thoughts*” (Spinoza 1985–2016, 1.228). But in them Spinoza tells us his “intention here is only to explain some of the more obscure things which are commonly treated by Writers on Metaphysics” (Spinoza 1985–2016, 1.299).

<sup>16</sup> Here see Huenemann (2002) on views in CM that differ from those of Descartes.

<sup>17</sup> Simonutti (1995, 134) suggests Cudworth might have been among the English thinkers with access to the TTP manuscript. But why think this? More, I note for comparison, was aware of the TTP after it was published in 1671 (Conway 1992, 519), but did not engage with it in detail until 1677 (Conway 1992, 519), after acquiring a copy of Kuyper's attack on it.

<sup>18</sup> For a relatively recent discussion of this, see Melamed (2010). Lærke (2010, 111) has references for passages in the TTP suggesting both necessitarianism and monism.

Cambridge, about Spinoza and the TTP (Simonutti 1995, 129).<sup>19</sup> There is also a 1671 letter from More to Boyle, in which More reports that he has been told that Spinoza “a Jew first, after a Cartesian, and now an atheist”, was the author of the TTP (*Conway Letters*, 518–9).<sup>20</sup> So van Limborch was telling at least one person in Cambridge about Spinoza and the TTP, and More had heard of this, so plausibly such information also reached Cudworth. I am not however aware of any evidence of van Limborch telling Cudworth directly about Spinoza, or of anyone involved connecting Spinoza to hylozoic atheism.<sup>21</sup> Do those letters suggest that there was at discussion of Spinoza that prompted Cudworth to respond? Maybe. But then again More, who clearly was aware of the TTP in 1671, seems not to have actually read it in any detail until 1677.

#### 4. More against the TTP

##### 4.1. About the “*Epistola altera*”

Henry More wrote at length against Spinoza in the late 1670s. More’s criticism of the TTP was the “*Epistola altera*”, or more completely the “Ad V. C. *Epistola altera, quæ brevem Tractatûs Theologico-politici Refutationem complectitur, paucâque sub finem annexa habet de Francisi Cuperi Libri scopo cui titulus est, Arcana Atheismi revelata, &c.*”.<sup>22</sup> More wrote these comments on the TTP in 1677 (More 1679, xii). They take the form of a letter to V.C., a *vir clarissimus*, a most famous man, who might perhaps have been F.M. van Helmont.<sup>23</sup>

The main body of the “*Epistola altera*” consists of chapter-by-chapter comments on the TTP.<sup>24</sup> That is followed by a discussion of Frans Kuyper’s 1676 book *Arcana Atheismi revelata* (*The Secrets of Atheism Revealed*) and a series of scholia. The last of those, the scholium to section 51 (a section which is itself in the discussion of Kuyper) is a discussion of Francis Glisson’s 1672 book *Tractatus de Natura Substantiae Energetica* (*Treatise on the Energetic Nature of Substance*).

I won’t attempt to give an account of the whole work, but pick out four themes: the way More sees Spinoza identifying God and nature in the TTP; More’s treatment here of the passages Cudworth later quoted from the TTP; the introduction of something like hylozoic

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<sup>19</sup> On this issue see also Simonutti (1990, 207). Her other papers listed in the bibliography are also useful. On Doiley and van Limborch, see also <https://spinozaweb.org/people/317>.

<sup>20</sup> Colie (1957, 73–4) supposes More heard this from van Limborch.

<sup>21</sup> Stanciu (2013) prints four letters from the correspondence, but all are written by Cudworth, and none illuminates the issue here.

<sup>22</sup> Thus it is, at least in title, a companion to the “*Epistola H. Mori ad V.C., Quæ Apologiam complectitur pro CARTESIO, quæque Introductionis loco esse poterit ad universam Philosophiam Cartesianam*” (More 1679, 105–29). In quoting the “*Epistola altera*”, I use the translation of Christian Hengsternann.

<sup>23</sup> Hengsternann argues for this in the introduction to his translation. Gabbey (1982, 214–5) reminds us that (a) this “V.C.” was not necessarily the same person to whom the earlier letter to V.C. about Descartes was addressed; (b) it has been thought that there was no particular individual V.C.; and (c) V.C. was presumably not an individual Englishman, otherwise More would have written in English.

<sup>24</sup> On the arguments of the “*Epistola altera*”, see Simonutti (1995, 131–3).



atheism in the discussion of Kuyper; and the connection of Glisson to that hylozoic atheism.

#### 4.2 God, nature, and mechanical monism

More is a careful reader of the TTP, and its connections to Spinoza's metaphysical views. He notes several connections between the TTP and Spinoza's book on Descartes's *Principles*.<sup>25</sup> He also finds considerable evidence in the TTP that Spinoza identifies God and nature.

Here are some example texts, just from the discussion of the early chapters.

On TTP ch.1: "Here he plainly confounds God and nature, making them one and the same thing, or rather acknowledges no other God than nature" (EA, s.7).

On TTP ch.3: "From this everyone who has not lost his nose entirely can smell what his conviction is, namely that there is no God except for the material nature of the things themselves, of which we are part, and that, therefore, our power is God's internal power und [sic] all things are likewise God" (EA, s.12).

On TTP ch.4: "Here you can clearly see that he implies that the effects or phenomena of nature are properties of the divine essence, thereby establishing quite openly once again that there is no God but nature itself" (EA, s.14); "he everywhere confounds divine power with the power of nature in this way" (EA, s.15).

Already at this stage, More has formed a pretty good basic picture of Spinoza's understanding of the nature of God—one that's constrained by the limited textual evidence he has, but fundamentally accurate in seeing Spinoza's monism.

More continues to point to that view of Spinoza's as the "*Epistola altera*" progresses. Here's one more such text, from the discussion of chapter 6 on miracles:

However, I suspect that Spinoza has secretly cherished in himself this monstrous error all along that there is no God but nature. In fact, he states it most bluntly in another scrap of an argument in the following words. He says: "The same thing could also easily be shown from the fact that the power of nature is the divine power and virtue itself and the divine power is the very essence of God, but this I am happy to leave aside for the time being" (ibid., p. 83). I leave it to everyone who still has a little wit left to judge whether he prays to anything other than motion and matter and what they produce, especially since a little later he attributes to nature an infinite power: nothing can be imagined that is superior to or more divine than it (EA, s.19).

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<sup>25</sup> In EA, see the scholia to sections 12, 16, 18, and 33.

Here we see again More reading Spinoza as identifying God and nature, but also his reading Spinoza as a sort of mechanical monist. On More's reading, Spinoza's account of nature is fundamentally mechanical, a matter of "motion and matter and what they produce". Spinoza may be presented as an atheist, but he is not presented as a hylozoic one.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, More does not discuss hylozoic atheism in the main body of the "*Epistola altera*", though it does appear in the later comments on Kuyper and Glisson.

#### 4.3 The passages in the TTP cited by Cudworth

Before I come to that, however, I want to look briefly at More's treatment of the two passages Cudworth quotes from the TTP.

Cudworth first quotes, from chapter 19 of the TTP, "that Assertion of a *Late Writer, Deum nullum Regnum in homines habere, nisi per eos qui Imperium tenent, that God Reigneth over men, only in the Civil Sovereigns*" (TIS 655–6). The very same text is quoted by More in the second paragraph of his s.43.

On the chapter 6 passage, Cudworth says that "As for that late *Theological Politician*, who writing against *Miracles*, denies as well those of the Former, as of this Latter Kind, contending that a Miracle is nothing but a Name, which the Ignorant Vulgar gives, to *Opus Naturae Insolitum, any Unwonted work of Nature, or to what themselves can assign no Cause off*" (TIS 707). Cudworth's "*Opus Naturae Insolitum*" is not a precise quote, but a gloss, seemingly on the second use of 'insolitum' in the first paragraph of the chapter, where in TTP we find "Vulgus itaque opera naturae insolita vocat miracula". In the "*Epistola altera*", More talks about this issue, and we find "naturae insolitum" in his essay. But he is quoting the first occurrence of 'insoliotum', in "aliquid in natura insolitum". In this case, Cudworth could not have been working straight from More's text. He must seemingly have consulted the text of the TTP—at least, the text of the first paragraph of the chapter on miracles—himself.

Notice though that all the explicit mentions of Spinoza in the *True Intellectual System* could be accounted for by Cudworth reading More's comments, and looking up one quote. Cudworth didn't need to know anything more about Spinoza than that, to make the two explicit references to Spinoza that are visible in the *True Intellectual System*.

#### 4.4 Kuyper, Glisson, and hylozoic atheism

If Cudworth read the "*Epistola altera*" he would not just have come across discussions of Spinoza, but also discussions of Kuyper and Glisson. Glisson was, we should remember, a Cambridge colleague of Cudworth and More. Kuyper was an ostensible critic of Spinoza, whom More suspected of promoting atheism and irreligion himself.

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<sup>26</sup> Later, in his discussion of the *Ethics*, we find More saying that "that substance which he contends is single in nature is matter, though eternal and infinite" (More 1991, 77)—there too he reads Spinoza as a materialist.

In the discussion of Kuyper, we find this:

However, as regards Kuyper, if he, in this ludicrous and risible way of writing, wanted to instill some poison into the reader's mind, it primarily took the two following forms: *There is no natural difference between good and evil* and: *There is no deity but nature itself, and nature itself is nothing else than eternal matter essentially and immediately alive by itself* and immediately and essentially unfolding and evolving on various occasions into the different modes of life, even those of perception, sensation, intellection and others of that kind (EA, s.50).

This, from More's account of Kuyper, is much more clearly hylozoic than anything in More's account of Spinoza. Reading the "*Epistola altera*", we do encounter someone portrayed as an atheist who thinks matter is essentially alive and thinking, but that person is Kuyper, not Spinoza.

Kuyper is not the only person More describes as thinking matter is alive and thinking. In the scholium to section 51, More introduces Glisson. This is the last of the scholia, and it may have been written after the rest of the "*Epistola altera*" was written in 1677, indeed after the publication of the *True Intellectual System* in 1678.<sup>27</sup> Anyway, here's how More characterizes Glisson's view:

when Kuyper says that modern atheists these days seek refuge in an innate life within matter instead of in mechanical motions, he points the sort of hypothesis which that most famous physician Francis Glisson has sought to delineate in the most accurate and distinct fashion in his *Treatise on the Energetic Nature of Substance or the Life of Nature*. Like Spinoza who holds that all substance, insofar as it is substance, exists from itself because it subsists through itself, he contends in that work that substance, insofar as it is substance, is necessarily alive by the force of its nature, i.e., it perceives, strives and moves by itself. He therefore assumes that the perceptive, appetitive and motive faculties are all intrinsic parts of matter itself (EA, scholium to s.51).

Glisson is, we might say in Cudworth's terminology, a hylozoist. More does not class Glisson as a hylozoic *atheist*, acknowledging that he "professes the existence of God as creator and of other incorporeal substances, and, in fact, insists upon it quite frequently".

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<sup>27</sup> More tells us he wrote the "*Epistola altera*" about the TTP in 1677, but it wasn't published until 1679, along with his work on the *Ethics*. Internal evidence suggests that the section on Glisson was added, or at least edited, between the initial writing and publication. More appears to refer to a view from Spinoza's *Ethics* ("Spinoza who holds that all substance, insofar as it is substance, exists from itself because it subsists through itself"). The main text of the "*Epistola altera*", and the scholia on connections to the book on Descartes's *Principles*, don't contain references to the *Ethics*. Later in the scholium, More talks about "the biusians (who are termed "hylozoists" by the learned author of the *True Intellectual System of the Universe*)". This too suggests a date after 1677, as until 1678 no-one was the author of the (published) *True Intellectual System*. In sum, unlike the rest of the "*Epistola altera*", we can't presume the discussion of Glisson was written before the *True Intellectual System* was published.

But he does think that hylozoism opens the door to atheism: “bolstered by the Spinozist view of the necessary existence of every substance as substance, the Glissonian way is such that it clearly supposes that there is no need of a creator God at all”. Moreover, More suggests that, if you’re going to be an atheist, you should be a hylozoic one. If you denied there was any immaterial substance, “it would be quite sensible to posit some immediate and primordial life immanent to matter” (EA, scholium to s.51).

More has quite a bit to say about Glisson’s view. Fundamentally, More argues that one ought to have his view (with an immaterial spirit of nature) rather than Glisson’s view (with living, thinking matter). The question is where to locate the powers that Cudworth would call plastic: in matter, or in some hypothesized spirit that controls matter?

There is much more one might take from the “*Epistola altera*”, but for current purposes I want just to emphasize one point. More identified one author of the 1670s whom one might call, in Cudworth’s terminology, a hylozoic atheist. That author was not Spinoza, but Kuyper. And More went on to identify another author of the 1670s whose views were hylozoic and might seem to tend to atheism. That author was also not Spinoza, but Glisson. Perhaps we also see in More the thought that a Spinozistic atheist ought to become a hylozoic one, because hylozoic views are a step in the right direction from mechanical ones. But there is no suggestion here that Spinoza himself made that step.

#### 5. Cudworth against hylozoic atheism

Hylozoism is fundamentally a view about the nature of matter, but Cudworth connects it to “Corporealism” (TIS 105) and atheism, even though he acknowledges that one could be a hylozoist without being an atheist. If you think all matter is alive in this way, and that it can organize itself to be capable of increasingly complex mental acts, there seems to be no need for an immaterial soul. That’s not to insist that every hylozoist is in fact a corporealist, but Cudworth thinks the view tends in that direction.

Cudworth also thinks that anyone who is both a hylozoist and a corporealist should be counted as an atheist. This is in part because the conception of matter makes it too much like God—because it is thinking, indeed has “an *Infallible Omniscience*” (TIS 106). Atheists, Cudworth argues (TIS 106–7), must attribute some of the features of God to matter, and this is perhaps especially clear in the hylozoic case. A further sign of atheism is that the hylozoist requires there to be “many Independent first Principles” (TIS 106), namely every thinking atom, rather than one ruling one.

The reason why hylozoic atheism is wrong is not simply, however, that it is a form of atheism. At least, Cudworth gives us more arguments than that. But he clearly does think it is wrong:

Nor indeed is it easily conceivable, how any should be induced to admit such a Monstrous Paradox as this is, That every Atom of Dust or other Senseless Matter, is Wiser than the greatest Politician and the most acute Philosopher that ever was; as

having an Infallible Omniscience of all its own *Capabilities* and *Congruities*; were it not by reason of some strong Prepossession, against Incorporeal Substance and a Deity (TIS 105–6).

One series of arguments against hylozoic atheism appears in the digression on plastic natures at the end of chapter 3 of the *True Intellectual System*. Cudworth wants to argue that the behavior of matter must be explained by the presence of an immaterial plastic natures. The hylozoic atheist agrees with Cudworth that mere mechanical interaction will not explain the phenomena we observe in the natural world. Indeed, they agree that some sort of thinking, done by a created being, must be invoked to explain those phenomena. They disagree with Cudworth about where to locate that power. Rather than locating it in plastic natures (or in a single Morean spirit of nature) they locate it in matter itself. Thus hylozoic views pose a particular challenge for Cudworth, as he already grants some of the motivation for them. The question then is, why locate the plastic power in hypothesized plastic natures, rather than in matter itself?

Cudworth gives us, in effect, four answers to that question when he lists four errors of the hylozoic atheists. Those four errors are: (1) making matter, which is the lowest thing, into the highest thing (TIS 172); (2) thinking that higher things such as reason arise from lower things (TIS 172–3); (3) making the plastic thing wise, which is a confusion (TIS 173); and (4) making the plastic thing material, when material things are incapable of this (TIS 173–4). One might sum this all up as an argument that matter is incapable of doing what hylozoic atheists say it can. They, no doubt, would respond that Cudworth is just misconceiving the nature of matter.

## 6. The 'two inadequate conceptions' view

Rather than focus on those criticisms (which are directed at hylozoism as a type of view, rather than any identifiable adherents of it), I want to look at one more set of views discussed in the *True Intellectual System*. These views are about people having two inadequate conceptions of a thing. Cudworth connects these views to hylozoic atheism, and they might well appear to be Spinozistic views. If we are to find textual evidence of Cudworth directly targeting Spinoza, it may be here.

### 6.1. First version

One version of this view involves two inadequate conceptions of body: as extended bulk, and life. Thus:

*Hylozoism* on the contrary makes all Body, as such, and therefore every smallest Atom of it, to have *Life* Essentially belonging to it (Natural Perception, and Appetite) though without any *Animal Sense* or *Reflexive Knowledge*, as if *Life*, and *Matter* or *Extended Bulk*, were but two Incomplete and Inadequate Conceptions, of one and the same Substance, called Body (TIS 105).

[B]ecause they take it also for granted, that there is no other *Substance* besides *Matter*, do thereupon adulterate the *Notion of Matter* or *Body*, blending and confounding it with *Life*, as making them but two *Inadequate Conceptions of Substance*, and concluding that all *Matter* and *Substance* as such, hath *Life* and *Perception* or *Understanding Natural* and *Inconscious* (TIS 144).

Again that *Extension* and *Life*, or *Cogitation*, are not *Two Inadequate Conceptions* neither, of one and the self same *Substance*, considered brokenly and by piecemeal; as if either all *Extension* had *Life* and *Cogitation* Essentially belonging to it, (as the *Hylozoists* conclude) or at least all *Life* and *Cogitation* had *Extension*; and consequently all *Souls* and *Minds*, and even the *Deity* it self were, either *Extended Life and Cogitation*; or *Living and Thinking Extension* (there being nothing in Nature Unextended; but *Extension* the only *Entity*, so that whatsoever is devoid thereof, is *ipso facto*, *Absolutely Nothing*) (TIS 830).

That the *Hylozoick Atheists* themselves (in this far wiser than the *Atomicks*) were fully convinced thereof: Nevertheless being strongly possessed with that *Atheistick Prejudice*, that there is no other *Substance* besides *Body*, they *Attribute* this first *Original Unmade Life* and *Understanding*, to all *Matter* as such, (but without *Animal Consciousness*) as an *Essential part* thereof, or *Inadequate Conception* of it (TIS 870).

There are some variations between the passages here, but also a clear central idea that there is one thing, body or matter, of which we have two different conceptions. Sometimes we think of it just as extended bulk. Sometimes we think of it as living (and perhaps understanding). Those are not conceptions of two different things, but two conceptions of one and the same thing.

It might be tempting to think of this as Cudworth's account of a Spinozistic view about the attributes of the one substance. One might think of the one substance under the attribute of extension, or under the attribute of thought, and neither would be wrong, but neither would capture the whole truth about it. Thus they would be—in a sense, if not in Spinoza's sense—inadequate conceptions.

One problem with this reading, is that it is not at all clear that Cudworth knew about that view of Spinoza's when he wrote the *True Intellectual System*. Moreover, there is a plausible argument that Cudworth was actually targeting a view of Francis Glisson's. Thus Henry (1987) argues that

it is perfectly clear ... that the Regius Professor of Hebrew had no one else in mind but the Regius Professor of Physic at Cambridge, Francis Glisson. It was only Glisson who argued in print for the natural perception and the natural appetite of

matter and who regarded life and matter as two *conceptus inadequati* of substance (Henry 1987, 28).<sup>28</sup>

That view about inadequate conceptions shows up early in Glisson's *Treatise on the Energetic Nature of Substance*, the work of his that we saw More commenting on (Glisson 1672, 10–11). Moreover—and this is key—Glisson uses the terminology of inadequate conceptions to describe this view, in a way that Spinoza does not, when he introduces his views about the attributes of the one substance.<sup>29</sup>

This is not the only reference to Glisson in Cudworth's discussion of hylozoic atheism. For instance, Cudworth cites a view about the "*Duplication of Corporeal Organs*" (TIS 173), which is Glisson's, and was also noted by the author of the review of Glisson's book in the *Philosophical Transactions* (Anonymous 1672, 5077). Later in the *True Intellectual System*, there is a positive reference to Glisson:

All Life cannot be meerly *Accidental, Generable and Corruptible*, producible out of nothing and *Reducible to Nothing* again, but there must of Necessity be, some *Substantial Life*, Which Point (That all Life, is not a meer *Accident*, but that there is Life Substantial) hath been of late with much Reason and Judgment, insisted upon, and Urged by the Writer *Of the Life of Nature* (TIS 839).

We should not—despite the suggestion of Levitin (2015, 420)—think that the existence of this positive reference shows Cudworth could not have been criticizing Glisson elsewhere. In Cudworth's eyes, Glisson was right to see that mechanical accounts of life or thought could not work, but wrong to locate the plastic power in matter itself, rather than in separate, immaterial plastic natures.

I won't say much about Glisson's views here. My goal right now is to answer my initial question about Spinoza. The relevant point is that something that may have looked like a Spinozistic view being targeted is in fact a view of Glisson's.

## 6.2. Second version

There is however a second 'two inadequate conceptions' view in the *True Intellectual System*. Consider these two passages:

But the Hylozoists conceive grosly both of *Life and Understanding*, spreading them all over upon Matter, just as Butter is spread upon Bread, or Plaster upon a Wall, and accordingly slicing them out, in different Quantities and Bulks, together with it;

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<sup>28</sup> Henry also cites Arrigo Pacchi as having said this previously. As Giglioli (2002) puts it, "Glisson regards the 'substantial nature' as an undifferentiated entity that can appear to our intellect as either *being (subsistentia fundamentalis)* or *energy (natura energetica)*" (Giglioli 2002, 245).

<sup>29</sup> Glisson was not the only person to talk about inadequate conceptions—see for instance Baxter (1667, 375, 530–2). But in the *True Intellectual System* this terminology Glisson uses is used to express a recognizably Glissonian view.

they contending that they are but *Inadequate Conceptions* of Body, as the only Substance; and consequently concluding, that the Vulgarly received *Notion of God*, is nothing else but such an *Inadequate* [sic] *Conception of the Matter* of the Whole Corporeal Universe, mistaken for a Complete and Entire Substance by it self, that is supposed to be the Cause of all things (TIS 173–4).

Wherefore according to the Principles of these *Hylozoists*, there is not any need of a God, at all; that is, of one *Perfect Mind* or *Understanding Being* presiding over the whole world; they concluding accordingly, the Opinion of a God, to be only a Mistaking, of the *Inadequate Conception of Matter* in General, its *Life and Energetick* Nature taken alone *Abstractly*, for a Complete Substance by it self (TIS 687).

The first passage repeats the previous view. But it also alleges a new ‘two conceptions’ view. Here again there are two inadequate conception of matter, but one of those conceptions is of matter as God. On this view, to think about God is really to think in an inadequate or confused way of all the matter of the universe.

This view too sounds like a reading of Spinoza—God and nature are the same thing conceived of in two ways. That has nothing essentially to do with hylozoism, though the second passage offers a way one might get to this view from hylozoism—effectively, become an atheist, then wonder what talk of God is about.

The passage might be about Spinoza. But it might also be about Glisson, or about no-one in particular.<sup>30</sup>

However, as Cudworth acknowledges Glisson is not an atheist, it seems implausible that he would assert that Glisson thought conceptions of God and matter were just two inadequate conceptions of the same thing. And Glisson surely does talk of God as distinct from nature.<sup>31</sup> Still, the inadequate conceptions language is Glisson’s language, as indeed is everything here aside from the view about God. We might even wonder, though this would be very speculative, if the talk about God is Cudworth’s suspicious reading of Glisson, rather than a view he attributes to anyone else.

Of course, perhaps Cudworth is not talking about any individual at all, but is rather talking about how he sees the position working out, if one thinks it through. That would explain why he uses Glisson’s language to state something that is not Glisson’s position. But it does not fit entirely well with his language (“they concluding”, etc.).

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<sup>30</sup> [There are other possibilities we might play with too. Could this conceivably be about Kuyper? Is there any clue to identification when Cudworth talks about hylozoists being convinced that “*Opera Naturae sunt Opera Intelligentiae*” (TIS 687)?]

<sup>31</sup> [Somewhat random example: “Deus non solùm causa efficiens est suarum creaturarum, verùm etiam Exemplaris” (Glisson 1672, 221).]



That said we might observe, in favor of reading Cudworth's remarks as comments on Spinoza, that he need not be drawing on a Spinozistic text—which would be a puzzle given his apparent lack of knowledge of the *Ethics*—but could instead be working through the identification of God and nature that we saw More find in the TTP. If those two are identical, what do we say about our rather different thoughts of them? One, at least, of those thoughts must be an inadequate representation of the underlying thing. So, perhaps, one might reason that the Spinozist must think that thoughts about God are inadequate conceptions of the material world.

## 6. Conclusion

Those two passages are quite puzzling. But what is the overall picture? There's not much evidence of Cudworth knowing about Spinoza's work, or engaging with it in any detail. For all the evidence shows, he could have read More's "*Epistola altera*" and looked up a quote. And there is a real shortage of direct references to Spinoza in the *True Intellectual System*.

We have also not seen good evidence that the discussion of hylozoic atheism is all or mostly about Spinoza. At some point Cudworth thought of Spinoza as having a view of this type—though when and why remain mysterious—but he does not target Spinoza within his discussion of hylozoic theism in the way that he targets Glisson there, or in the way that he targets Hobbes in his discussion of atomic atheism.

Cudworth does make vague references to knowing about a reviver, or revivers, of hylozoic atheism. It's not possible—at least I haven't been able—to tie those references definitively to beliefs about any particular individual. But we should note that the references fit Kuyper probably as well as they fit Spinoza. Cudworth presumably knew about Kuyper from More, if not from more detailed study. Moreover, there were others around with views that Cudworth associated with hylozoic atheism, even if he did not directly call them hylozoic atheists. Francis Glisson was certainly one. There are several references to his view in the discussion of hylozoic atheism in the *True Intellectual System*. He may not loom large to us as a theorist of matter or metaphysician, but he presumably seemed rather more important, and rather more in need of refutation, to his Cambridge colleague. Meanwhile Margaret Cavendish, with her views about rational, sensitive, and inanimate matter, was dismissed by Cudworth as having a view, "the Suggestors of [which] are but mere *Novices in Atheism*, and a kind of Bungling *Well-wishers* to it" (TIS 137). But her books too might have added to the sense of there being increasingly many views involving living or thinking matter.<sup>32</sup> Add Glisson and Cavendish to Kuyper—and add in some "*Canting Astrological Atheists*" (TIS 138) and some "in the garb of Enthusiastical Religionists" (TIS 140), either of which groups might well be hylozoic atheists if they philosophized more carefully—and we can start to see how Cudworth might have thought a sort of hylozoic materialism was on

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<sup>32</sup> Cavendish presented some of her works to Cambridge colleges (Cavendish 1676, 3–14). Cudworth does not identify Cavendish's view with hylozoism, presumably because of the presence of inanimate matter.

the rise and needed refutation, whether or not he thought Spinoza had anything to do with it.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps, it is true, the last two passages I discussed are aimed at Spinoza, though this is not obvious. But fundamentally the answer to my main question about how much of the *True Intellectual System* is directly about or aimed at Spinoza is, not very much at all.

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<sup>33</sup> It would of course be very useful to know when exactly Cudworth came to think that Spinoza had become a hylozoic atheist, but we do not. Moreover, even if we did know that, it would not tell us that Cudworth knew very much about Spinoza at that point.

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