“The Spinozan-Wolffian Philosophy? Mendelssohn’s *Philosophical Dialogues* of 1755”

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Mendelssohn’s *Philosophische Gespräche* (*Philosophical Dialogues*), first published in 1755,[[1]](#footnote-1) represents his first philosophical work in German. Rather surprisingly for a debut, in the first two dialogues of that work Mendelssohn attempts nothing less than a defence of the legacy of the most controversial philosopher of his day, Benedict de Spinoza. On a fairly straightforward reading of Mendelssohn’s discussion, he admits the theoretical errors committed by Spinoza, particularly his denial of free-will to God, but argues that Spinoza might be allowed to have anticipated the demonstrated truths of the Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy in the form of the pre-established harmony and the nature of the actual world as it existed in God’s mind before creation. Without taking issue with the details of this reading, what I will attempt to do in this paper is to enlarge the context, and if possible to raise the stakes, of Mendelssohn’s discussion in order to bring out what I take to be a much more ambitious project on Mendelssohn’s part, namely, not only the rehabilitation of a fellow Jewish thinker but also the rehabilitation of metaphysics as such by means of a thorough accounting of the Spinozan elements in the Wolffian philosophy. As I will show, framing the project of the *Gespräche* too narrowly is responsible for obscuring much of what I take to be most original and insightful in Mendelssohn’s use and interpretation of Wolff’s thought, as well as his ultimate purpose in resolving what he regarded as an ongoing crisis in metaphysics that is responsible to no small extent for its widespread neglect.

To this end, the following will be divided into three parts. In the first, I will contend that Mendelssohn’s discussion of the pre-established harmony in the first dialogue is a quite deliberate re-invocation of the *Pietismusstreit*, the first major German intellectual controversy of the 18th century, and that the purpose of this invocation is just to point to what Mendelssohn regards as an unmistakable Spinozistic commitment within the Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy. In the second, I will consider Mendelssohn’s *prima facie* peculiar praise for Wolff’s attempted refutation of Spinoza, and will argue that in fact Mendelssohn takes Wolff’s refutation to betray an undeniable sympathy for Spinoza’s thought. Finally, I will show how this prepares the way for Mendelssohn’s claim of a deeper Spinozistic moment in Wolff’s own metaphysics, albeit one that Mendelssohn insists remains compatible with “sound reason and religion”. In the end, I hope not only to draw out the primary aim and context of Mendelssohn’s original *Gespräche*, but also to underline Mendelssohn’s originality, and boldness, as a thinker within the Leibnizian-Wolffian tradition.

1. The Spinozan Challenge to Wolff’s Metaphysics and its Context

As is well known, in the first of the *Gespräche*, Mendelssohn contends that Spinoza rather than Leibniz invented the pre-established harmony, with the initial key piece of evidence being the scholium to IIIp2 of the *Ethics*, in which Spinoza affirms that the changes in motions in bodies are not derived from the soul (*JubA* 1, 7–8/*PW* 100–1).[[2]](#footnote-2) Furthermore, Mendelssohn cites IIp7 as evidence that Spinoza holds that even the inadequate concepts on the part of the soul do not have their source in the body, but that instead both series of alterations occur in parallel with one another, which point Leibniz apparently draws on in his response to Bayle’s objections that the transition from one state of the soul to another is inexplicable without reference to the influence of the body (*JubA* 1, 10/*PW* 103). Mendelssohn naturally acknowledges some key differences in the way in which Leibniz makes use of the harmony; thus he only contends that “Leibniz brought this hypothesis into his system” (*JubA* 1, 9/*PW* 102) and combined it with his own views on freedom and the system of possible worlds. In spite of these differences, however, Mendelssohn contends that as regards “what is essential [*das Wesentliche*]” concerning the harmony, Leibniz quite deliberately drew the doctrine from Spinoza. So, when he is later pressed on the point by Lessing in a letter,[[3]](#footnote-3) Mendelssohn contends that it is sufficient that Spinoza endorses: (1) that motion and thought are distinct, (2) that neither can be the efficient cause of the other, (3) such that only thoughts follow from thoughts and motions from motions, and 4) that even so the respective series harmonize with one another (*JubA* 12.1, 12–13).[[4]](#footnote-4) That Leibniz should thus draw the doctrine from Spinoza without acknowledging his source is taken by Mendelssohn as an attempt by the canny Leibniz to avoid the controversy that such an acknowledgement would inevitably invite (*JubA* 1, 11–12/*PW* 104)

Mendelssohn’s claim on this score is, as a number of scholars have noted, hardly without precedent, as the charge that the Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy generally harboured Spinozistic elements had long dogged it.[[5]](#footnote-5) The first to raise this charge, as far as I can tell, was Volckmar Conrad Poppo (1695–1753), a pastor in Groß- und Klein-Romstedt, who published a critique of Wolff’s logical and mathematical works entitled *Spinozismus detectus*,[[6]](#footnote-6) which contended that Wolff’s misapplication of the mathematical method in philosophy, which is distinct in object, aim, and method from mathematics, entails fatalistic consequences.[[7]](#footnote-7) Two years after this, the anti-Wolffian theologian Joachim Lange (1670–1744) made an extensive case for a more deeply-rooted Spinozism pervading Wolff’s entire metaphysics in anonymous remarks published on behalf of the theological faculty in Halle.[[8]](#footnote-8) There, for instance, Lange identifies Wolff’s definition of God primarily in terms of a representing being, rather than in terms of possessing a will, as Spinozistic (§I.iii–iv); claims that Wolff likewise denies possibility and genuine contingency in the world in favour of an infinite but necessarily connected series of events, as a consequence of which miracles and God’s providence are denied (§I.v–vi); holds that Wolff extends a “Stoic and Spinozistic fate” to free human actions (II.v); and sees traces of Spinoza’s claim that the mind is the idea of the body in Wolff’s identification of the soul as a power for representing the world limited by the body (§III.ii).

Lange’s most consequential charge, however, was his claim that the Leibnizian pre-established harmony, endorsed by Wolff, is drawn directly from Spinoza’s *Ethics*. This accusation is first levelled in the *Anmerckungen*, where he claims that Spinoza also accepted that the soul and body do not influence one another’s states but that there is nonetheless an agreement among their respective series of alterations. In support, Lange cites a number of texts, including the first proposition of book V (“In just the same way as thoughts and ideas of things are ordered and connected in the mind, so the affections of the body or images of things are ordered and connected in the body”), though the first text he cites comes from the scholium to IIIp2 (“The body cannot determine the mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion”), and is in fact rather less probative on this matter:

[men] are so firmly persuaded that the body now moves, now is at rest, solely from the mind’s command, and that it does a great many things which depend only on the mind’s will and its art of thinking. For indeed, no one has yet determined what body can do[[9]](#footnote-9)

Lange provides a much more detailed case for the claim of a Spinozan origin of the harmony in the subsequent *Modesta disquisitio*.[[10]](#footnote-10) In particular, Lange identifies six hypotheses concerning which Leibniz (and Wolff) and Spinoza are in agreement: (1) the soul does not act on the body; (2) the body and its organs have no role in forming the ideas of corporeal things in the soul; (3) the soul, as a sort of automaton, develops the order and connection of the series of its ideas from its own nature; (4) the motion of the body proceeds solely from its own mechanical structure and is only determined by the motion of other bodies, which proceed in an infinite series; (5) the order and connection of ideas in the mind is the same as the order and connection of motions and changes in bodies; (6) the agreement or harmony of these orders is predetermined by God.[[11]](#footnote-11) Lange proceeds to cite a variety of textual sources to support each of these claims, and indeed finds his case for a Spinozan source of the harmony so convincing that he accuses Leibniz of actually plagiarising the pre-established harmony from Spinoza, who had expressed the doctrine in its essentials in *Ethics* IIp7. In any case, Lange concludes that the doctrine is continuous enough with Spinoza’s views that the endorsement of the harmony can also be taken to signal Leibniz’s adoption of Spinoza’s fatal necessity.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Wolff responded immediately to Lange’s accusation of Spinozism with a series of texts that emphasized the basis that his metaphysics provides for proper notions of possibility and contingency. Wolff’s preliminary response was in the form of a notice in the *Neue Zeitung von gelehrten Sachen* in July 1723,[[13]](#footnote-13) where he denies that his assertion of the *nexus rerum materialium*—the connection of material things through the principle of sufficient reason—amounts to necessitarianism (Spinozistic or otherwise) inasmuch as Wolff allows that “all of space of the world could have been filled in a completely different way than it is in fact filled”.[[14]](#footnote-14) Wolff elaborates on this point in the *De differentia nexus rerum sapientis et fatalis necessitatis nec non systematis harmoniae praestabilitae et hypothesium Spinosae luculenta commentatio* (Halle, 1723) as well as in a shorter follow-up piece, the *Monitum ad commentationem luculentam* (Halle, 1723). In the former text, he emphasizes the distinction between his and Spinoza’s conception of possibility/impossibility, as well as necessity/contingency,[[15]](#footnote-15) and contends, controversially, that the fatalism of the Spinozistic system has its root in his contention that not merely the existence but the essences of things are the result of a divine decree, that is itself necessitated, such that anything that exists does so necessarily and anything that does not is impossible.[[16]](#footnote-16) For Wolff, by contrast, the essences of things are not created by God, only their existence is, and since God’s choice of creating this world is freely willed (on moral grounds) so that he might have created a different world of things, this world exists contingently.[[17]](#footnote-17)

As Wolff takes this to vindicate his claim that material things are connected in space from the charge of amounting to a Spinozistic necessity, he turns to addressing Lange’s charges against the pre-established harmony, which he does by contending that the system of harmony preserves the freedom of the human soul. Wolff does this through deploying Leibniz’s own argument on this score, namely, that the actions of the soul are determined but not absolutely necessary since the opposite is possible, and yet they are free because these actions proceed from the soul itself and are not externally coerced.[[18]](#footnote-18) Significantly, Wolff also responds directly to Lange’s claim that Leibniz drew this text directly from Spinoza, arguing that the doctrine as it is found in Leibniz (at least in Wolff’s preferred version) differs from that formulated by Spinoza. As Wolff points out, drawing here on the scholium to IIp7 (which proposition had also been cited by Lange), Spinoza ultimately denies that thought and extension are different substances but are rather *one and the same* substance that is considered now under the mode of extension, now under the mode of thought. This renders the issue as to what accounts for the observed harmony between the states of motion in the body and the representations in the mind a “*vana quaestio*” since in the end the respective series are simply identical.[[19]](#footnote-19) By contrast, for Wolff, who accepts that the soul and the body are distinct substances, it remains a legitimate question as to how the states of one agree with the other, a question to which of course Wolff takes the pre-established harmony as the best but not the only possible answer nor indeed a trivial one. Wolff further points out that in addition to belonging to different substances, the connection in the series themselves are different inasmuch as they are taken by Leibniz to proceed according to different laws of order (teleological as opposed to mechanical) such that rather than being similar in nature, they are only similar in time,[[20]](#footnote-20) and so Leibniz would hardly accept Spinoza’s claim in IIp7 itself. Accordingly, Wolff concludes that Leibniz could not have drawn the pre-established harmony from Spinoza.

This controversy between Wolff and Lange regarding the alleged Spinozistic consequences of his harmony—a charge that culminated in Wolff’s exile from Prussia later in 1723 and which played out in publications stretching into the 1730’s—provides essential context for Mendelssohn’s *Philosophische Gespräche* of 1755. Clearly, Mendelssohn’s general claim that Leibniz borrows the harmony from Spinoza, as well as the ways in which he prosecutes this case (including his characterization of the essence of the harmony in the letter to Lessing), are more than redolent of Lange’s discussion. And though Mendelssohn does not mention Lange in the course of his resurrection of this charge, there is reason to think that he was aware of its source in the Halle theologian. As Altmann has pointed out, the resemblance between Mendelssohn’s and Lange’s cases for this claim did not go unnoticed already in the 18th century as Karl Heinrich Heydenreich, a later defender of Jacobi (and Spinoza) against Mendelssohn, offers the following account of Mendelssohn’s discovery of this argument in his *Natur und Gott nach Spinoza* (1789):

I do not know whether he knew this himself, that this [business with Lange] had already taken place. I would almost think that [Mendelssohn] took such an interest in Wolff that out of curiosity at one point he paged through Lange’s book against Wolff (the *Modesta disquisitio*). Lange left no stone unturned in attempting to present the Leibnizian philosophy as dangerous, and believed that he could strike it down with a single blow if only he could show that it stemmed from Spinoza.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Heydenreich’s claim is offered only as a speculation, but there is in fact evidence (unmentioned or unnoticed by Altmann and Heydenreich) that Mendelssohn in all likelihood had more than a passing knowledge of Lange’s original criticism. In the catalogue of Mendelssohn’s private library compiled for its auction after his death, we find listed a single text by Joachim Lange, namely, *Ausführliche Recension der wieder die wolfianische Metaphysik auf 9 Universitäten herausgegebenen 26 Schriften*, published in Halle in 1725.[[22]](#footnote-22) This text provides a detailed summary of the criticism Lange had enacted of Wolff (up until 1725 at any rate), with summaries of the discussion of the pre-established harmony in the *Anmerckung*, *Causa Dei*, and *Modesta disquisitio*, as well as a particularly thorough presentation of the lengthy discussion in the *Bescheidene und Ausführliche Entdeckung*.[[23]](#footnote-23) In addition, Lange also provides a summary of Ruardus Andala’s *Disputatio philosophica de unione mentis & corporis physica*, a text in which Andala repeats his claim (from 1712) of a resemblance between the harmony and Spinoza’s parallelism.[[24]](#footnote-24) In his summaries, Lange does not provide references to specific passages in Spinoza’s *Ethics*, though it is not hard to imagine that after perusing Lange’s text, Mendelssohn might have been motivated to look at his own copy of Spinoza’s *Opera posthuma* for himself and reconsider these same passages in light of Wolff.

Assuming, as is likely, that Mendelssohn was aware of Lange’s original charge, this sets up a crucial rhetorical parallel between Leibniz’s deliberately unacknowledged borrowing from Spinoza on the one hand and Mendelssohn’s similarly unacknowledged borrowing from Lange on the other. What this parallelism would suggest is that Mendelssohn’s proffered justification of Leibniz’s borrowing can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to his own. So, Mendelssohn writes in defense of Leibniz’s borrowing:

To repudiate a doctrine, [its opponents] need only to know that, in the case of this or that writer, it stood in a pernicious kinship with errors. They cannot imagine that one can tear it free and cleanse it of the poison which had entered it through the infection of errors that, along with it, constituted a whole. If Leibniz had openly confessed that he borrowed the essential part of his harmony from Spinoza, tell me, would these people not have believed from the outset that they found, in the reference to Spinoza’s name, the basis for refuting this doctrine? (*JubA* 1, 11/*PW* 104).

The suggestion, then, is that Mendelssohn is likewise deliberately drawing upon Lange’s criticisms without acknowledging him in order to avoid the hazards associated with naming the source. Mendelssohn of course has good reason not to acknowledge Lange—being reminded that this claim has its origin in Lange, the *Ur-*opponent of Wolff, would make latter-day Wolffianians, among others, immediately uninclined to accept it.[[25]](#footnote-25) In thus knowingly resurrecting Lange’s charge, Mendelssohn is therefore signalling that he views Wolff’s own various responses to this charge as inadequate, and that he takes Lange to have ultimately been correct that there was a non-trivial overlap between Wolffian and Spinozan metaphysics.

2. Wolff’s Refutation and the “Strongest Side” of Spinoza

It is, to say the least, odd that Mendelssohn, a committed Leibnizian-Wolffian philosopher, would revive these charges on the part of Wolff’s opponents, and indeed that he should do so not even a year after Wolff’s death in (April) 1754. No less odd, however, is Mendelssohn’s characterization of Wolff’s final and presumably definitive response to the accusation of Spinozism, namely, the full-dress refutation of Spinoza as presented in his *Theologia naturalis, pars posterior* of 1737.[[26]](#footnote-26) Mendelssohn endorses Wolff’s refutation, which he credits with successfully exposing Spinoza’s error, and one argument in particular is regularly cited throughout Mendelssohn’s discussions of Spinoza. The argument exposes a faulty account of the construction of an infinite magnitude that is allegedly involved in Spinoza’s account of the attribute of thought: “[Wolff] proves that Spinoza believed that an infinite perfection could, as it were, be composed of an infinite amount of finite perfections, and, finally, he shows the lack of foundation for this view” (*JubA* 1, 16/*PW* 108).[[27]](#footnote-27) Even so, it is apparently not Mendelssohn’s fondness for this argument that accounts for his incongruently high praise for Wolff’s refutation:

Of all Spinoza’s adversaries, only Wolff is not subject to this reproach [of engaging in calumny]. This great philosopher, before he refutes Spinozism, casts it in its proper light. He shows the strongest side of it, and, precisely by this means, he has discovered its weakness better than anyone else. (*JubA* 1, 15/*PW* 107)

Yet how, precisely, Wolff’s *refutation* shows the “strongest side” of Spinoza’s thought is not immediately clear. Wolff for instance, situates his discussion of Spinoza’s error among his treatment of the errors of paganism, Manicheanism, and Epicureanism in the *Theologia naturalis*. Mendelssohn, however, seems to have thought that Wolff provided an unusually charitable account of Spinoza’s errors, though to see this we will need to consider Wolff’s widely neglected refutationin a little more detail.

Indeed, Mendelssohn’s praise for Wolff’s refutation is justified, at least in the context of 17th and 18th century treatments of Spinoza, since Wolff’s discussion avoids the dismissive and opportunistic treatments that had until that point been standard fare. As opposed to Bayle, for instance (*JubA* 1, 15–16/*PW* 107–8), Wolff evinces a thorough familiarity with and understanding of (at least the first two books of) the *Ethics*, and he formulates counter-arguments that strike to the heart of Spinoza’s metaphysics rather than trading in opportunistic misrepresentations.[[28]](#footnote-28) Moreover, in contrast with the strategy he had adopted in his earlier writings (discussed above) of vigorously denying that his own views had the fatalistic consequences endorsed by Spinoza, Wolff now seeks to offer a comprehensive rebuttal of Spinozan metaphysics on the basis of his own metaphysical principles, serving to highlight the incompatibility of the two systems, but also to discover the basis of Spinoza’s errors within his faulty ontological definitions and principles. Concerning the former aim, Wolff provides a number of arguments against Spinoza’s account of extension (*TN* II, §§688–93), bodies (§§694–6), substance (§§697–706), and souls (§§707–8). Among Wolff’s criticisms are that on the basis of a faulty Cartesian concept of extension (one drawn, according to Wolff, from the senses and imagination; cf. *TN* II, §688), Spinoza wrongly takes extension as something real rather than a phenomenon grounded upon simple substances (*TN* II, §689), which further implies that extension cannot be conceived through itself, as Spinoza claims, but only through these substances (§691). Holding extension to be something real underlies Spinoza’s claim that bodies are mere modifications of divine extension (§694), which as modifications are consequently denied any independent power to modify one another and so any such power is possessed by God alone (§§695–6). Concerning substance, Wolff notes that it is only Spinoza’s departure from the “received signification” of the concept that leads him to deny that there can be more than one substance (§§697–8), that substances cannot be created (§699), and that substance necessarily exists (§§700–1). Lastly, concerning thinking things, Wolff contends that Spinoza wrongly views infinite thought as composed of an infinite number of finite thinking things, which Wolff contends is simply absurd (§§706–7), and it is in connection with this last criticism concerning souls that Wolff offers the objection that is variously cited by Mendelssohn.

To focus on these arguments in isolation from the rest of the refutation, however, would be to miss what is truly distinctive and original in Wolff’s discussion of Spinoza, as well as that aspect of Wolff’s presentation which I take to have been most important for Mendelssohn. This is, namely, Wolff’s initial careful consideration of the various definitions at the root of Spinoza’s metaphysics at the outset of his refutation. In *TN* II,§§672–87 in particular, Wolff lays out Spinoza’s definitions of ‘attribute,’ ‘substance,’ ‘mode,’ and ‘finite thing,’ and then proceeds to elucidate these through his own. Beginning with the definition of attribute, Wolff contends that insofar as Spinoza understands through this that which is first conceived of some thing, where this implies that no further intrinsic reason can be given for why this attribute exists in some thing, then this is just what Wolff has identified as an *essential determination* (*TN* II, §679). This is not problematic in itself, though Wolff notes that the notion of attribute includes or presupposes the notion of *substance*, whereas that of essential determination merely presupposes the idea of a thing or *being* (*ens*). Regarding the distinction between mode and substance, Wolff claims that this distinction is made along a single axis, namely, merely in terms of the contrast between being in another (modes) and being from itself (substance) (§§682, 684). This leads Spinoza to conflate attributes “properly so-called”, or properties that are posited along with the essence of a thing, with modes “properly so-called” which are merely possible on the basis of the positing of an essence (§682). Concerning Spinoza’s definition of finite things in terms of something capable of limitation, Wolff notes that Spinoza takes ‘limitation’ in a peculiar sense inasmuch as he presumes that any limitation on the part of a thing can only be conceived through the posit of some other thing that limits it (§686), and Wolff contrasts this with his own (“mathematical”) conception of limitation (§685) according to which a limited thing has an internal reason for its limitation on the basis of which it makes the existence of other limited things at its boundaries possible (§686).

On the basis of these definitions, the confusions and ambiguities of which are only discernable from the vantage of Wolff’s ontology, the key planks of Spinoza’s monistic and necessitarian metaphysics can be seen to follow. Spinoza’s misidentification of attributes with essential determinations, and his consequent mistaken inclusion of the notion of substance in the definition of attribute yields Spinoza’s claim that if something is a *substance* then it requires nothing else in order to be conceived (cf. *TN* II, §680). On the basis of this, substance is identified narrowly as being from itself (since it requires nothing else to be or be conceived), which leads to Spinoza’s contention that there is but a single substance (since only one being, God, has its being from itself). By contrast, modes are broadly identified as whatever has its being from another, which would include attributes “properly so-called” (which have their sufficient reason in the essential determinations of a substance, such that when those determinations are posited then those attributes are likewise actually posited) but also modes, properly speaking, which do not have the sufficient reason for their actuality (only for their possibility) in the essence of a substance. However, Wolff claims that Spinoza ultimately cannot acknowledge this distinction since the actuality of modes, properly speaking, finds a ground on the basis of their finite nature, where their limitation has its sufficient reason in some other, finite thing (*TN* II, §681). This implies an *actual* infinity of modes (since a further mode is always required to limit each successive limited mode), but it also renders the existence of each mode *necessary*, since no other mode is possible on the basis of the antecedent series. According to Wolff, then, Spinoza’s errors proceed from a failure to engage in a properly rigorous ontology, a failure due ultimately to Spinoza’s acceptance of the Cartesian “principle” that that which is clearly and distinctly perceived is true (§687n) which prevents him from analysing his initial ontological notions sufficiently.

Now we might think that Wolff takes this laying-bare of the conceptual confusions to which Spinoza was subject to thoroughly undermine the trenchancy of his system and to put to rest any concerns that Wolffian metaphysics harbours Spinozistic sympathies, at the same time as it provides an object-lesson in the need for a rigorous ontology to proceed any metaphysics.[[29]](#footnote-29) By contrast, Mendelssohn clearly viewed Wolff’s treatment as offering a novel, and unusually charitable, account of the origin of Spinozan metaphysics. Indeed, Wolff can be taken to set an unexpectedly conciliatory tone for his discussion at the very outset when he dismisses the popular charge that Spinoza simply conflated God and nature by emphasizing the distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* (*TN* II, §670).[[30]](#footnote-30) What Mendelssohn, I suspect, saw that was so valuable in Wolff’s discussion was that it showed Spinoza’s doctrine to have its origin in erroneous and ambiguous definitions, rather than in “the baseness of his heart” (cf. *JubA* 1, 16/*PW* 108) as an effort to undermine the foundations of morality and religion; moreover, it allowed the opposition between Leibnizian-Wolffian and Spinozan metaphysics to be cast as nothing more than a verbal dispute. As he later writes regarding Spinoza in *Morgenstunden*:

You know how much I am inclined to explain all of the controversies of the philosophical schools as merely verbal disputes or at least as originally deriving from verbal disputes. If the tiniest detail changes in a silhouette, the entire image at once takes on a different look, a different physiognomy. So, too, with words and concepts. The slightest deviation in the determination of a fundamental term leads in the end to completely opposite consequences (*JubA* 3.2, 104–5/*MH* 75)

While Mendelssohn’s analysis of philosophical debates in terms of verbal disputes is relatively well-known,[[31]](#footnote-31) the fact that in chalking Spinoza’s fatalistic metaphysics up to a verbal dispute Mendelssohn points primarily to Wolff’s announced *refutation* of Spinoza is nonetheless striking in its boldness. According to Mendelssohn, Wolff’s exposition and critical discussion of Spinoza’s initial definitions in the *Ethics* has not served, as Wolff himself concludes, to expose once and for all Spinoza’s thought as atheistic and a threat to religion (cf. *TN* II, §716), but rather serves as evidence that Wolff himself came to acknowledge that Spinoza’s philosophy contained some truth, even if it takes the distinctive perspective of Wolffian ontology to reveal it. It is in this way, then, that Mendelssohn can claim that Wolff’s refutation of Spinoza in fact shows the “strongest side” of Spinoza, and more suggestively, that even “Spinoza would himself have given it his approval with pleasure” (*JubA* 1, 16/*PW* 108).

3. Wolff, Spinoza, and the *Intellectus Dei*

Yet, Mendelssohn’s interpretation of Wolff’s refutation is only a preparatory step for his assertion of a deeper continuity between Wolff and Spinoza. Mendelssohn contends namely that there is an essential Spinozan moment at the heart of Wolff’s metaphysics, which is to say, a *further* acknowledged debt on Wolff’s part to Spinoza. This is put forward in Mendelssohn’s claim that Spinoza’s system represents an accurate account of the world as it exists in the intellect of God *antecedenter ad decretum*:

[Neophil:] You know, the Leibnizians attribute to the world a twofold existence as it were. It existed, to use their language, among possible worlds in the divine intellect prior to the divine decree. [...] Now Spinoza remained at that first stage of existence. He believed that a world never became actual outside God and all visible things were not subsisting for themselves, up to this hour, outside God, but instead were still and always to be found in the divine intellect alone. What, then, the Leibnizians maintained about the plan of the world as that plan existed in the divine mind *antecedenter ad decretum* is what Spinoza believed it possible to maintain about the visible world. (*JubA* 1, 17/*PW* 109)

This is not unrelated to the previous disclosure regarding the pre-established harmony. Mendelssohn contends that this key difference between Leibniz and Spinoza accounts for the fact that Spinoza could hold that there is a harmony between the series of thoughts and that of motions while denying that this requires the posit of an independent power of the soul as the source of its representations. Even so, Mendelssohn’s reference to the “Leibnizians” here is telling as it indicates that it is not Leibniz himself but rather Wolff whom he has specifically in mind.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Indeed, a closer look would suggest that, rather than simply pointing out a fortuitous continuity between Wolff and Spinoza, Mendelssohn is actually underlining another unacknowledged and more significant conceptual borrowing from Spinoza on Wolff’s part. In connection with this disclosure, Mendelssohn cites Wolff’s discussion of contingent things earlier in his *Theologia naturalis*, where he claims that God thinks the possibility of contingent things inasmuch as he considered His own perfections in a limited way (*TN* II, §92), an account that Mendelssohn claims echoes Spinoza’s own in *Ethics* IIp9: “Every individual thing expresses the divine properties in a certain limited manner” (cf. *JubA* 1, 17/*PW* 109). As it happens, Wolff’s account is presented in the context of a chapter concerning the divine intellect, entitled “*De intellectu Dei*” with the early sections devoted to accounting for the origin and nature of the representation of possible worlds in God.

The chapter begins straightforwardly enough, with Wolff claiming that God represents all possible worlds, and everything in each world, at once (*TN* II, §§79–80), and that He represents all of this perfectly distinctly (*TN* II, §81). However, Wolff proceeds to claim that the “representation of all possible worlds is absolutely necessary in God” since to hold otherwise would be to deny that God’s representative power is a single immutable act (*TN* II, §§72, 83). On the basis of this, Wolff claims that the representation of all possible worlds, and the essence of every particular thing within them, originates in God’s own essence (§84), and Wolff considers in some detail how the essences of particular things are attained through limitations of divine realities. So, Wolff distinguishes what he refers to as the “first possibles [*prima possibilia*]” as those realities in God that do not presuppose anything prior in order to be conceived (*TN* II, §87) and which are consequently unlimited (cf. *TN* II, §88). The introduction of limitations to these first possibles yields a further set of possibles, which Wolff refers to as “second primitive possibles” which presuppose only the first (cf. *TN* II, §91), and the combination of these in accordance with the principle of non-contradiction yields the essences of possible individual things from which their specific properties follow through the principle of sufficient reason (*TN* II, §95). By way of illustration, Wolff offers a mathematical example: one might imagine an unlimited line (i.e., the first possible), that is subsequently limited and made into a finite segment (i.e., the second primitive possible), which segments are in turn combined to form individual geometric figures with specific essences and features that follow from them (i.e., a finite or limited thing—*TN* II, §§85, 95).

Altmann has questioned (rightly, to my mind) whether Mendelssohn is correct in identifying Wolff’s account of the possibility of contingent things with Spinoza’s.[[33]](#footnote-33) Even so, Wolff’s broader claim that God (at this initial stage) immanently contains the world, and that the essences of all possible things are grounded in (or even modifications of) God’s essence, and indeed necessary, still has a distinctly Spinozistic ring. This can be brought out by briefly comparing Wolff’s claims on these points with Leibniz’s treatment in the “Monadology” where he takes up a narrower version of this issue in his rejection of Poiret’s claim that the eternal verities in particular depend upon God’s will. According to Leibniz, the eternal truths (including essences and possibles) are not arbitrary but “depend solely on [God’s] understanding.”[[34]](#footnote-34) However, it is not clear how precisely these essences relate to the divine understanding, namely, whether they are to some extent identifiable with it (so that these essences *constitute* the divine intellect) or instead serve as in some sense distinct (but co-eternal) objects for it. Indeed, Leibniz maintains the former in a number of places, claiming for instance that God’s essence “comprehends” all other essences and even that God could not be conceived perfectly without also conceiving of all other essences;[[35]](#footnote-35) yet, there is significant evidence for the latter view as well, as Leibniz characterizes essences as an “object” of the divine intellect, even if an *internal* one, and relatedly asserts that it can no more be said that God and the things known by Him are the same than that the perceiving mind and what it perceives are the same.[[36]](#footnote-36) Turning to Wolff, he similarly denies that essences and possibles have their ground in the divine will, claiming that such truths are *not* subject to God’s *free* will (“*Perperam nimirum voluntati liberae subjiciunt*”) and consequently that they proceed *necessarily* from His intellect (*TN* II, §83n; cf. the scholium to Ip17). Concerning the relation between essences and possibles and the divine intellect and essence, however, Wolff unambiguously identifies them, asserting that essences or possibles have their ground in God’s essence, insofar as they are contained within it, to the extent that “those who deny the absolute necessity of the representation of all possible worlds in God, also negate [*tollere*] the divine essence” (*TN* II, §84n; cf. *Ethics* Ip25). Commensurately, Wolff is clear that essences are not an *object* of God’s intellect but that He is conscious of these, and all possible worlds, just insofar as He is conscious *of Himself*, that is, *self-conscious* (*TN* II, §86).

In his discussion of the divine intellect, then, it becomes apparent that Wolff disambiguates and develops the Leibnizian position on the relation of essences to the divine intellect in ways compatible with Spinoza’s views on the topic. Of course, there are obvious and important differences between Wolff’s and Spinoza’s positions that cannot be ignored; for instance, Wolff allows for more than one (indeed infinite) possible worlds that make up the divine essence, though this serves to insulate Wolff from the necessitarian consequences of his adoption of (what he now acknowledges to be) the Spinozan position on essences.[[37]](#footnote-37) What in any case becomes clear is that Mendelssohn, in pointing to this further continuity, is not simply outlining an abstract possibility—a way in which Spinoza *might* be understood so as to be compatible with Wolffian thought—but is pointing to another actual if unacknowledged Spinozan moment in Wolff’s own metaphysics. In spite of the continuity, Mendelssohn would concede that Spinoza remained one step from the truth insofar as the “world of Spinoza [...] is an ideal world; it is what according to Leibniz’s system, the archetype for this world was before the decree” (*JubA* 1, 353/*PW* 109); yet, here again it is likely that he is drawing on Wolff, and specifically on one of Wolff’s own rather peculiar diagnoses of Spinoza’s error. According to Wolff, a key commitment that grounds Spinoza’s entire metaphysical edifice is Spinoza’s rejection of the possibility of a genuine creation from nothing: “Spinozism arises from the impossibility of creation combined with the principles of the Cartesian philosophy, and through the abuse of the criterion of truth that is established in that philosophy” (*TN* II, §677). That Spinoza rejects the possibility of such creation is clear—it is most explicit in his “Principles of the Cartesian philosophy”,[[38]](#footnote-38) but also in Ip18 and the Appendix to book I of the *Ethics*—yet it is odd that Wolff would take it as a driving concern, rather than merely as a (welcome) implication of Spinoza’s principles. From Mendelssohn’s (rather generous) perspective, that Wolff should fault Spinoza for failing to admit the possibility of creation is nonetheless taken to leave the door open that Spinoza might have been essentially correct regarding the state of the world in God’s intellect before that event.

If Mendelssohn (on my reading of him) is right, then the result of these considerations reveals a surprising, and more profound, continuity between Wolff and Spinoza than previously thought. As is well known, Wolff did not accept Leibniz’s doctrine of a universal harmony of substances but rather only accepted the more limited claim of a pre-established harmony between the soul and the body, but even so he professed to endorse this only as a hypothesis for explaining the observed agreement between their respective states, albeit a better-founded one than its occasionalist and influxionist alternatives. Consequently, the continuity established in Mendelssohn’s first dialogue, in accordance with Lange’s original charges, only scratches the surface when it comes to plumbing the depths of the influence of Spinozan thought upon Wolff’s metaphysics, but extends further through Wolff’s sympathetic critique of Spinoza in his own refutation to his account of essence and to the doctrine of the divine intellect. Indeed, in light of Mendelssohn’s contention of this deeper continuity, Wolff’s later discussion in the refutation might be regarded as intended to limit the consequences of incorporating these Spinozan elements within his own system earlier in the *TN*, rather than as a self-standing criticism. Yet, Mendelssohn is clearly not resting content with having revealed an *accidental* continuity between Wolff and Spinoza but rather takes himself to have shown that Wolff *intentionally* borrowed from Spinoza in constructing his own metaphysics.

The question this raises, of course, is *why* Mendelssohn would make such a striking, even shocking claim? While there is plenty of room for speculation concerning the answer, we can at least be certain that Mendelssohn’s aim is not the same as Lange’s, namely, to undermine and discredit the Wolffian philosophy, given Mendelssohn’s own apparently unshakable commitment to it. The answer, I would suggest, has to do with what Mendelssohn has identified as a crisis facing contemporary metaphysics, one with which he frames the second dialogue of the *Gespräche*. Amidst a sceptical public, metaphysics itself has fallen into disrepute (cf. *JubA* 1, 13/*PW* 105), and pneumatology or the doctrine of spirits, with its essential discussions of God and immortality is widely neglected. Part of the blame for this, Mendelssohn thinks, lies with the trend towards popular philosophy (as a result of French influence), but it also lies with those metaphysicians like Leibniz and Wolff who incorporate elements of Spinoza’s thought into their own metaphysics even as they attempt its refutation and denounce it as wholly inconsistent with morality and religion. The result, for the philosopher, is precarious as metaphysics remains vulnerable to recurrent accusations of crypto-Spinozism and all that that entails, whereas the result for the broader literate public is a growing cynicism with the endless controversy facing the discipline due to the unexorcised, and seemingly unexorcisable, spectre of Spinoza. Accordingly, in resurrecting the charges against Wolff that were originally laid against Leibniz, and indeed, in pursuing a comprehensive and unsparing exploration of the influence of Spinoza on Wolff’s metaphysics, while also drawing attention to precisely where Spinoza departs from the truth, Mendelssohn is seeking ultimately and finally to immunize metaphysics from the harmfulness of Spinoza’s legacy. Mendelssohn’s point, then, is that metaphysics will only continue to persist in a state of crisis until contemporary philosophical rationalism delivers a forthright accounting of its debts to Spinoza and, looking ahead (at this juncture) to the *Pantheismusstreit*, it is hard to deny that he was right.[[39]](#footnote-39)

1. The *Philosophische Gespräche* was initially published (anonymously and apparently without Mendelssohn’s knowledge by Lessing) in 1755 (Berlin, Voß) as a self-standing work, but later incorporated into the *Philosophische Schriften* of 1761 (Berlin, Voß), with some changes made particularly to the third dialogue. (For the circumstances of publication of the *Gespräche*, see Alexander Altmann’s *Moses Mendelssohn: A Biographical Study* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society/University of Alabama Press, 1973], 36–9). Both versions of the *Gespräche* are included in volume 1 of the *Gesammelte Schriften, Jubiläumsausgabe*, ed. A. Altmann, et. al. (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Frommann Holzboog, 1971; 1–39 and 335–377). The *Philosophische Schriften* has been translated into English as *Philosophical Writings*, by Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) (cited within the following as ‘*PW*’). Translations of *Morgenstunden* follow those in *Morning Hours: Lectures on God’s Existence*, trans. D. Dahlstrom and C. Dyck (Springer, 2011) (cited as ‘*MH*’). All of Mendelssohn’s works are cited according to the volume and page number in the *Jubiläumsausgabe* (cited within the text as ‘*JubA*’). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Translations from Spinoza’s *Ethica* follow those in *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, ed. and trans. E. Curley, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985) and, as is standard scholarly practice, the *Ethics* is cited according to book (Roman numeral); definition (‘d’), axiom (‘a’), or proposition (‘p’); and corresponding number. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See *JubA* 12.1, 6–8; especially 7: “Leibniz will durch seine Harmonie das Räthsel der Vereinigung zweyer so verschiedenen Wesen, als Leib und Seele sind, auflösen. Spinoza hingegen sieht nichts Verschiedenes, sieht also keine Vereinigung, sieht keine Räthsel, das aufzulösen wäre”. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For a detailed consideration of these points, see Alexander Altmann, “Moses Mendelssohn on Leibniz and Spinoza” in *Die trostvolle Aufklärung. Studien zur Metaphysik und politischen Theorie Moses Mendelssohn* (Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1982), 28–49; here 40–4; and Detlev Pätzold, “Moses Mendelssohn on Spinoza” in *Moses Mendelssohn's Metaphysics and Aesthetics*, ed. Reinier Munk (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 107–130; especially 120–2. (It will become evident that Altmann’s authoritative treatment of Mendelssohn’s discussion of Spinoza in the *Gespräche* informs the present treatment at a number of key junctures, though I will note some important differences in the course of what follows.) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is noted, for instance, by Altmann, “Mendelssohn on Leibniz and Spinoza”, who also observes that this was previously indicated by F. H. Jacobi and Karl Heinrich Heydenreich (cf. 36 and 44–6). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Full title: *Spinozismus detectus, Oder Vernünfftige Gedancken von dem wahren Unterschied der Philosophischen und Mathematischen Methode oder Lehr-Art* (Weimar: Mumbachen, 1721). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See, for instance, §I.10 on the distinct aims and objects of mathematics and philosophy, and §IV.20ff for the harms Poppo takes to be introduced as a result. For more on Poppo’s criticism, see Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002); 542–3. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The remarks were composed in 1723 but only subsequently published by Wolff, along with his own reply, as *Der Theologischen Facultaet zu Halle Anmerckungen über des Herrn Hof-Raths und Professor Christian Wolffens Metaphysicam****,*** *von denen darinnen befindlichen so genannten der natürlichen und geoffenbarten Religion und Moralität entgegen stehenden Lehren. Nebst beygefügter Hr. Hoff. R. und Prof. Christian Wolffens Gründlicher Antwort* (Cassel, 1724). For Lange’saccount of the circumstances of the text’s publication, see *Ausführliche Recension der wieder die wolfianische Metaphysik auf 9 Universitäten herausgegebenen 26 Schriften* (Halle, 1725), 1–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Quoted in *Anmerckungen*, §III.xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Modesta disquisitio novi philosophiae systematis de Deo, mundo, et homine* [...] (Halle, 1723). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Modesta disquisitio*, 138–9 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Modesta disquisitio* , 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. As noted by Altmann (“Mendelssohn on Leibniz and Spinoza”, 36 and 36n35), this work is referred to in C. G. Ludovici’s *Ausführlicher Entwurf einer vollständigen Historie der Wolffischen Philosophie*, (vols. I–III, Leipzig, 1735–1738) as “*Christian Wolffens Erinnerung wider diejenigen, die in seiner Metaphysik den Spinozismus entdecket zu haben vermeinen*”, (cf. vol. I, §254; 208–9) which was published in *Neue Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen* (8 July, 1723), 527–8 (though this brief letter from Wolff does not itself bear a title). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See “*Erinnerung*”, 527 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *De differentia*, I.vii–viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *De differentia*, I.xi–xiii. For more details on this, see Morrison, “Wolff’s Criticism of Spinoza”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 31 (1993), 405–20; especially 409–10. Wolff’s claim that Spinoza holds that the essences of things are also created is taken from Spinoza’s “Principles of the Cartesian philosophy” (see the Appendix to chapter III [*Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, 307] and chapter VII [*Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, 327]), rather than the *Ethics* which defends a different view (more on this below). This is in response to Lange’s (and others’) criticism of Wolff’s rejection of the claim that essences are dependant on the divine will as “Spinozistic”; see, for instance, *Ausführliche Rezension*, 22–3, responding to *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt* or *Deutsche Metaphysik* (1st edn. Halle, 1719), §994. On the context for Wolff’s attribution of this view to Spinoza, see Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero, “L’origine delle essenze: Wolff, Spinoza e i teologi”, in *Essentia actuosa. Riletture dell’*Etica*di Spinoza*, edited by Andrea Sangiacomo and Francesco Toto, Milano: Mimesis, 2016, 93–116; especially 94–103. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Again, see Morrison, “Wolff’s Criticism”, 408–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *De differentia*, II.xxi. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. *De differentia*, II.xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *De differentia*, II.xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Heydenreich, *Natur und Gott nach Spinoza* (Leipzig: Müller, 1789), 91. For Altman’s discussion of Heydenreich, see “Mendelssohn on Leibniz and Spinoza”, 44–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See *Verzeichniß der auserlesenen Büchersammlung des seeligen Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Berlin, 1786), 16 (#262). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. *Bescheidene und ausführliche Entdeckung der falschen und schädlichen Philosophie in den Wolffianischen Systemate Methaphysico von Gott, der Welt und dem Menschen* (Halle, 1724) (discussed in *Ausführliche Recension* 31–40). Relatedly, the register of Mendelssohn’s library also lists a copy of Ludovici’s *Ausführlicher Entwurf* (*Verzeichniß*, 234 [#286]), which catalogues these and other controversies surrounding the Wolffian philosophy. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Lange, *Ausführliche Recension*, 94–105. See Andala’s *Disputatio philosophica, continens quaetionem physicam, sive psychologiam de unione mentis & corporis physica netiquam metaphysica* (Halle, 1724); §XLV–LIX. The original charge was made in his *Dissertatio de unione mentis et corporis physica* in *Pentas dissertationum philosophicarum* (Franecker 1712), as noted by Altmann (“Mendelssohn on Leibniz and Spinoza”, 35 and 35n33) and citing Ludwig Stein, *Leibniz und Spinoza. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Leibnizischen Philosophie* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1980), 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. It bears noting that shortly before the composition of the *Gespräche* Lessing was engaged in a controversy with one of Lange’s sons, Samuel Gotthold; on this dispute, see H. B. Nisbet, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: His Life, Works, and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford UP 2013), 139ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Theologia naturalis, methodo scientifica pertractata. Pars posterior, qua existentia et attributa Dei ex notione entis perfectissimi et natura animae demonstrantur, et atheismi, deismi, fatalismi, naturalismi, Spinosismi aliorumque de Deo errorum fundamenta subvertuntur* (Frankfurt & Leipzig, 1737) (this work is cited in text as ‘*TN* II*,*’). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. See for instance *Morgenstunden*, lecture 13 (*JubA* 3.2, 110–13; *MH* 79–81) and *An die Freunde Lessings* (*JubA* 3.2, 205–7). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. On the significance of Wolff’s discussion of Spinoza for his reception in Germany, see Ursula Goldenbaum, “Spinoza – ein toter Hund? Nicht für Christian Wolff” in *Zeitschrift für Ideengeschichte*, vol. 5 (2011), 29–41. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See *TN* II*,* §687n: “We see, therefore, how necessary a properly cultivated first philosophy is, that is, one that can be traced back to true notions which are also distinct and determinate, unless one would prefer to amble blindly concerning the most difficult things and to fall headlong into all sorts of errors. Indeed there is no other reason [than this as to] why we have begun the study of philosophy [*philosophandi*] from first philosophy and [only] through it sought to shine a light on the remaining parts of philosophy”. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This was a point, it bears mentioning, that Wolff elsewhere credits to the intervention of Ehrenfried Walther von Tschirnhaus, a former intimate of Spinoza and an early mentor to Wolff. See *Christian Wolffs eigene Lebensbeschriebung*, ed. Heinrich Wuttke (Leipzig: 1841), reprinted, with a preface by Hans Werner Arndt, in Christian Wolff, *Gesammelte Werke*, Pt. 1, Deutsche Schriften, Vol. 10 (Hildesheim: Olms, 1980); 127: “[Tschirnhaus] mir von Spinoza sagte, er habe keineswegs Gott und die Natur mit einander confundiret, wie man ihm insgemein imputierte, sondern Gott multo significatius als Cartesius definiret.“ [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See Daniel O. Dalshtrom, “Verbal Disputes in Mendelssohn‘s *Morgenstunden*”, in *Moses Mendelssohn’s Metaphysics and Aesthetics*, 3–20 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. This is also noted by Altmann; cf. “Mendelssohn on Leibniz and Spinoza”, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See Altmann, “Mendelssohn on Leibniz and Spinoza”, 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. “Monadology” §45, in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, trans. and ed. L. Loemker, 2nd edn. (Dordrecht 1989), 647. See also *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* (ed. and trans. A. Farrer and E. M. Huggard [Chicago: Open Court, 1990), §335 (326–7). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. For these points, see “Comments on Spinoza’s Philosophy” in *Philosophical Essays*, trans. and ed. R. Ariew and D. Garber (Indianapolis, 1989), 273; and “Conversation du Marquis de Pianese Ministre d’Estat de Savoye, et du Pere Emery Eremite” in Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Sechste Reihe, vol. IV (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999), 2269 (my thanks to Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero for this latter reference). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Again, see “Monadology” §46 in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 647; “Comments on Spinoza’s Philosophy” in *Philosophical Essays*, 275; and *Theodicy* §189 (246): “Moreover these very truths can have no existence without an understanding to take cognizance of them; for they would not exist if there were no divine understanding wherein they are realized, so to speak.” For discussion of this ambiguity in Leibniz’s doctrine, see Bertrand Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), 178–81; and C. D. Broad, *Leibniz: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), 157–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Wolff himself seems to have realized that Spinoza ultimately holds (in the *Ethics*) that essences do not depend on the divine will, and so that his view comes closer to Spinoza’s in this respect; thus, in *TN* §673n, he writes concerning Spinoza’s conception of essence that the account in the “Principles of the Cartesian Philosophy” “are not carried over into the system he puts forth [in the *Ethics*] because there he philosophizes in Descartes’ mindset and not really in agreement with his own teaching as set forth in the *Ethics*”. On this point, see Camposampiero, “L’origine delle essenze”, 105 and 112–16. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. See *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 1, 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. My thanks to Ansgar Lyssy, Ursula Goldenbaum, and Matteo Favaretti Camposampiero for their discussion of and comments on previous drafts of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)