

Singular Thing / 485

- iii. The intellect is described as “entirely passive” (KV2.15[5]; KV2.16[5]; cf. E3def3exp; Mignini 1986b; Pozzi 1990; Renz 2015).
- iv. **Desire** is said to depend on the judgment that something is **good** (KV2.16[2]), rather than the reverse (cf. E3p9s; Scribano 2012).
- v. The power of **reason**, the intermediate grade of cognition, over the **passions** is tightly circumscribed (KV2.21; cf. Marshall 2015; Schechter 2015; Sangiacomo 2019).
- vi. Some **causal** interaction between the **mind** and **body** is permitted (KV2.19; cf. Garber 2015a; Jaquet 2015, 47–49).
- vii. The immortality of the soul is proved on the basis of its ability to detach itself from the body and achieve union with God (KV2.23; cf. Curley 1977a).

Further work is needed to determine the extent to which Spinoza’s views genuinely changed from the KV to the *Ethics*, and why.

Stephen Zylstra

RECOMMENDED READING

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RELATED TERMS

Action and Passion; Attribute; Blessedness; Cause; Desire; Eternity of Mind; *Ethics*; God; Good and Evil; Immanence; Love; Mind; Mind–Body Identity; *Natura Naturans* and *Natura Naturata*; Reason; Substance

167.

SINGULAR THING

“**S**INGULAR THING” (*res singulares*) is one of the terms Spinoza uses to denote **finite** particulars. The term figures prominently in most of his philosophical works (with the exception of the **TTP**, where it figures only briefly in the account of **prophecy**,

and the **TP**, where the term goes unused). However, its precise meaning evolves from its earliest appearance in the **TIE** to its final appearance in the *Ethics*. In the *Ethics*, the definition of the term (i) stipulates that singular things are finite and (ii) specifies the conditions under which many things compose one singular thing. However, in Spinoza's earlier writings, the term is not restricted to finite and mutable things, nor is it associated with the composition of one (singular) thing from many distinct things. This short entry traces those shifts in meaning.

In **TIE**, some singular things are changeable (Spinoza uses the comparative, *mutabilis*) while others are “fixed and eternal [*fixis, atque aeternis*]” (**TIE**[101]), presumably in the sense that they are unchanging in every respect. The changeable singular things include the objects of ordinary **experience**, such as an apple. By contrast, the fixed and eternal singular things are apprehended intellectually; they are the “Physical things, or . . . real entities” (**TIE**[101]) that we ultimately aim to understand when we pursue knowledge of nature. Moreover, the changeable singular things derive their **essence** from the fixed and eternal singular things (**TIE**[101]), though it is not clear how precisely Spinoza takes this dependence to work. One possible interpretation is that the essence of something like an apple (a changeable singular) depends on such things as motion and rest (fixed and eternal singulars) in the sense that there are **laws** of motion and rest that govern how the apple would behave and change over **time** in any set of circumstances. (This proposal is at least implicitly embraced by scholars such as Margaret Wilson (1996, 115) who identifies the fixed and eternal singular things of the **TIE** with the objects of the “**common notions**” described in the *Ethics*.)

Yet the fixed and eternal singular things will not typically be recognizable to humans as singular: “because of their presence everywhere, and most extensive **power**, they will be to us like universals” (**TIE**[101]). For instance, the locative questions we typically ask about ordinary objects – “Where is the apple?” – will not have informative answers when asked about the fixed and eternal singulars such as motion and rest. Because of this, arguably, these singular things will *appear* as if they were **universals or abstractions**, which Spinoza opposes to real beings (e.g., at **TIE**[95, 99]).

Subsequently, in **KV** – a text in which Spinoza has begun to explicitly embrace **substance** monism – his usage changes. The term “singular thing” is now reserved for things that are “particular” (**KV**1.8, 1/47), “corruptible” (**KV**2.5, 1/62), and at least implicitly, finite (**KV**2pref, 1/51). They are contrasted with things that are “eternal and incorruptible” (**KV**2.5, 1/64), which Spinoza at this point no longer numbers among the singular things. The eternal and incorruptible things seem to be what Spinoza will later refer to as **infinite modes**; so, for instance, he writes that “we shall suppose as a thing proven, that there is no other mode in **Extension** than motion and rest, and that each particular corporeal thing is nothing but a certain proportion of motion and rest” (**KV**app2, 1/120). The claim that singular things are *finite* particulars marks a key step toward the version of that concept eventually deployed in the *Ethics*.

But there is arguably a second significant shift in Spinoza's conception of singular things, which is apparent in the official definition of that term in the *Ethics*:

Singular Thing / 487

By singular things I understand [1] things that are finite and have a **determinate** existence. And [2] if a number of **Individuals** so concur in one action that together they are all the **cause** of one effect, I consider them all, to that extent, as one singular thing. (E2def7, enumeration added)

The definition contains two conditions on the application of the term “singular thing.” First, there is a *finitude condition*, which is satisfied by objects that are finite and have a determinate **existence**. “Determinate existence” is a term Spinoza uses to refer to existence that is subject to boundaries either in space or in time. Passages such as E1p21d and E5p29d suggest that “duration” is a kind of determinate existence (being bounded in **time**), and in Eϕ50, Spinoza claims that “figure” is a certain kind of determinate existence (being bounded in spatial Extension). So, in general, the definition of “singular thing” applies only to objects with an existence characterized by a finite duration or figure.

Second, there is a *composition condition*, which is satisfied by collections of singular things when they jointly produce some unified effect. When a number of distinct singular things satisfy this condition, the term “singular thing” can also be applied to them as a unit. That is, their functional unity licenses them to be treated as a singular **whole** rather than a plurality of distinct objects. (Spinoza’s use of “individual” in this passage is drawn from the NS; as Curley rightly suggests, it is probably only a “double translation,” E2def7, note 2, not an allusion to the technical notion of “individual” that is later developed in the Physical Digression after E2p13s.)

The first condition clearly has its roots in the KV concept of a singular thing, as both require singular things to be finite and bounded in space and time, at least in some sense. But the second condition has no clear lineage. It addresses a question that appears entirely absent from his earlier discussions of this topic: when do many singular things compose one? Although this conclusion is speculative, this evolution of the concept of a singular thing may indicate Spinoza’s growing interest in making sense of the metaphysics of composition and parthood in the context of his mature substance monism.

John Grey

KEY PASSAGES

E2def7. TIE[101]. KV1.8; KV2.5.

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RELATED TERMS

Abstractions and Universals; Common Notions; Individual; Infinite Modes; Infinity and Finitude; Parts and Wholes; Substance